



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

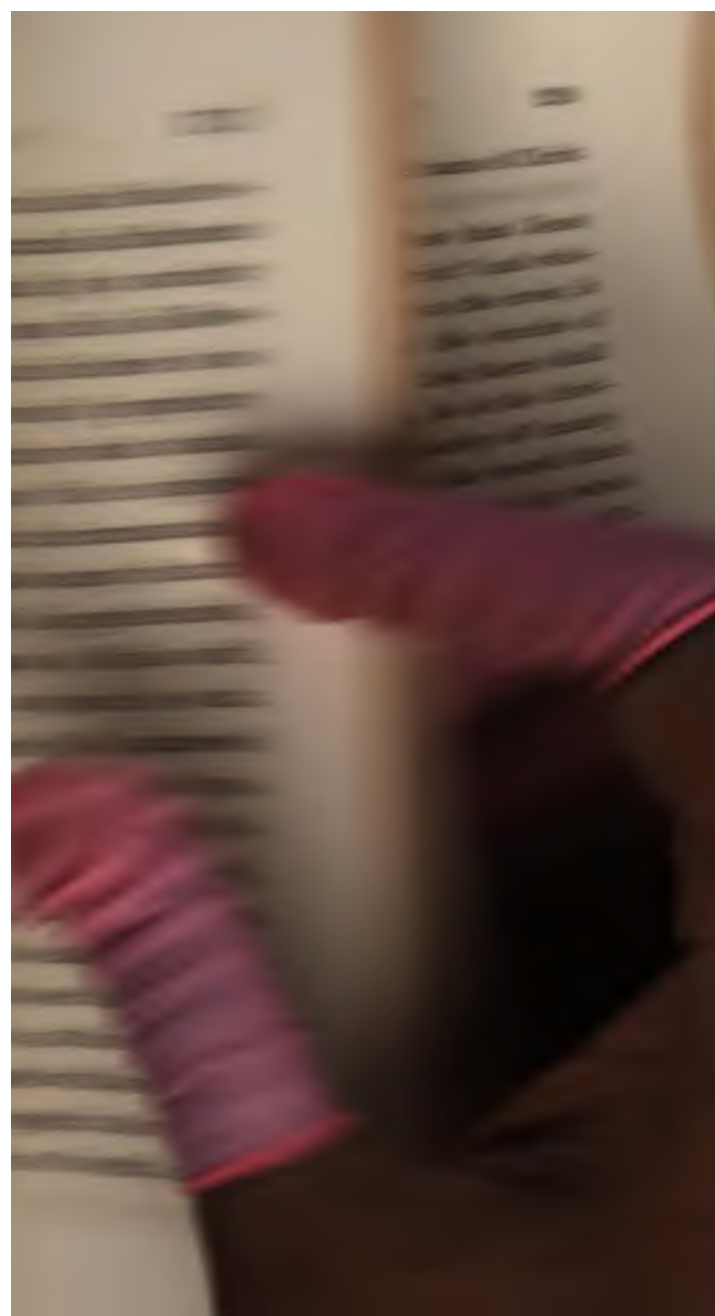
We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



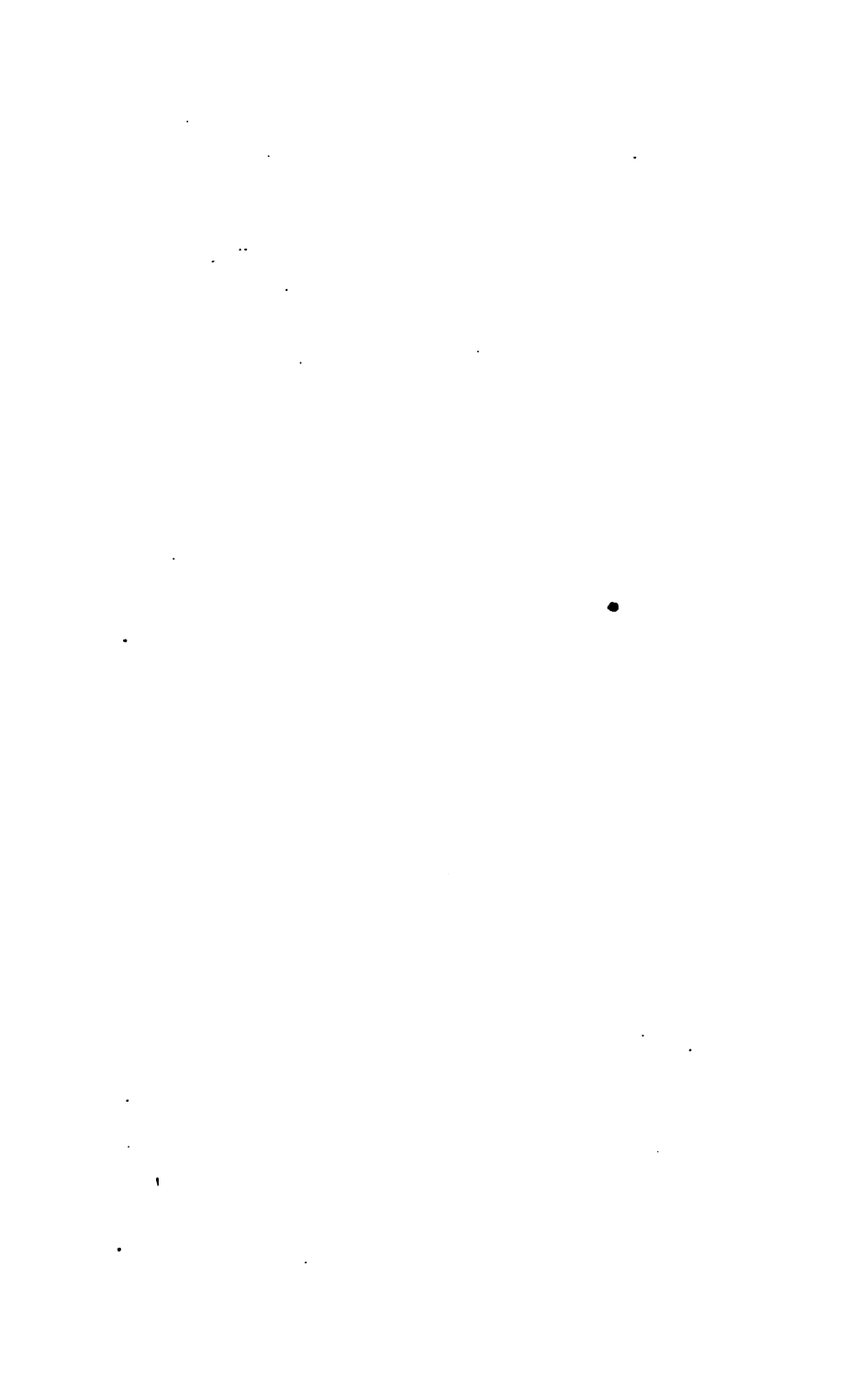




600046036P

35.

386.





600046036P

35.

386.

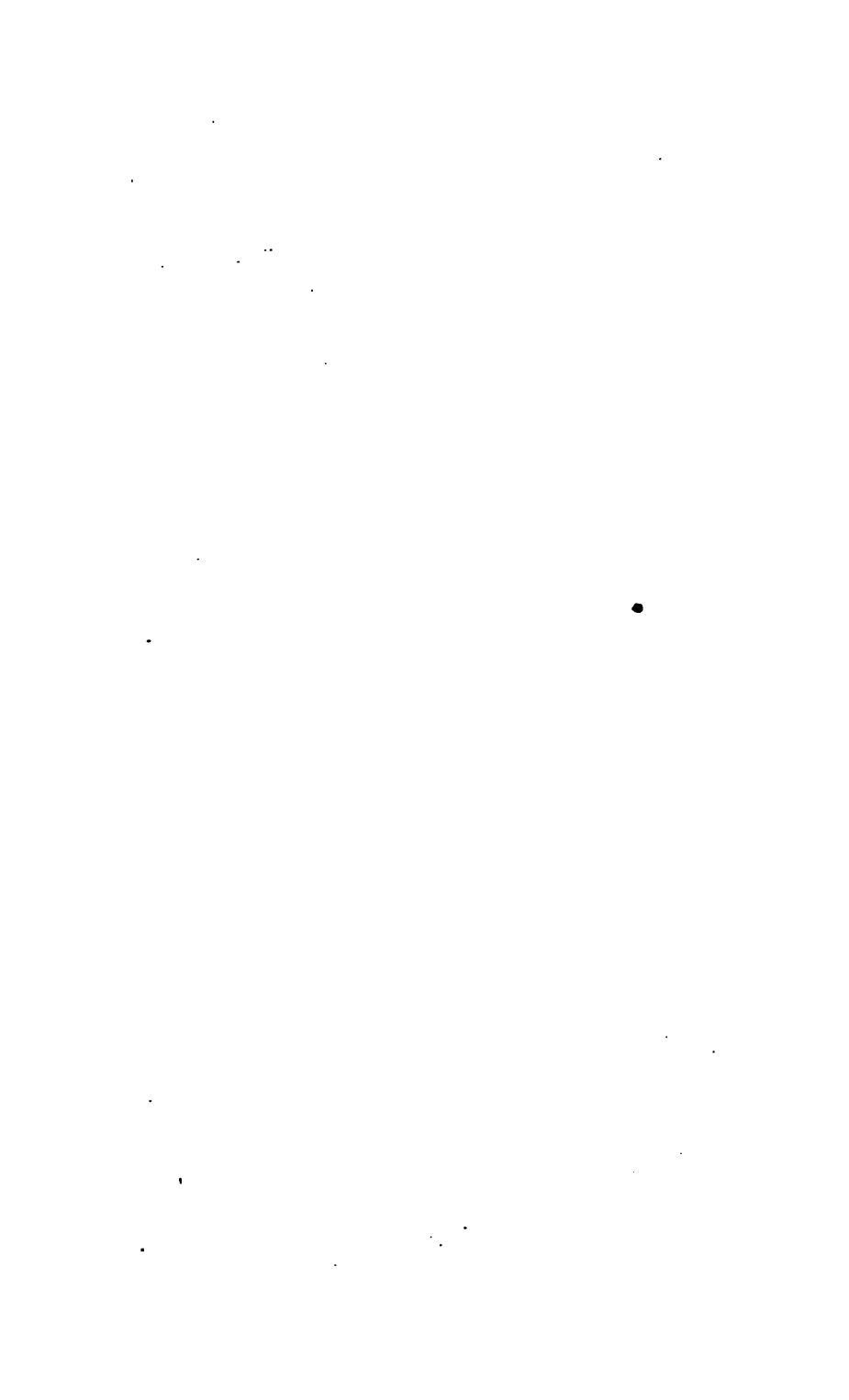




600046036P

35.

386.





THE

CHURCH AT PHILIPPI,

OR THE

DOCTRINES AND CONDUCT OF THE
EARLY CHRISTIANS

Illustrated:

INTENDED TO SERVE AS AN HISTORICAL COMMENTARY UPON
ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

WITH A RECOMMENDATORY INTRODUCTION, BY THE

REV. JOHN PYE SMITH, D.D.

LONDON:

RICHARD GROOMBRIDGE, PANYER ALLEY,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

1835.

386.

P R E F A C E.

So completely does the Epistle of St. Paul to the Church at Philippi unfold the nature and spirit of primitive Christianity, so interesting is every particular connected with the history of that favourite Church of the Apostle, and so strikingly do all the circumstances of its history tend both to corroborate and to illustrate the truth of the Gospel, that the perusal of a consecutive narrative of those circumstances can scarcely fail to afford gratification and instruction. The more enlarged illustration of the subject, by a reference to the conduct and sentiments

of the early Christians in general, will not, it is hoped, be considered inappropriate.

Throughout the entire work the author has endeavoured to avoid all allusion to the minor disputes that agitate the diversified parties of Christian professors: he has sought, on the present occasion, to extinguish within himself all desire to insinuate any favourite opinion or speculation, or to aim at any other object than that of introducing the reader into the atmosphere, as it were, of New Testament and primitive Christianity, and of inducing a just and salutary recognition of the beauty of holiness, as displayed in one of its loveliest examples.

The remarkable agency to which the success of the Gospel, as preached by the Apostles, is attributable, ought, certainly, to

have formed one of the principal subjects of description and discussion in the following pages. The agency to which reference is made is, of course, that of the Holy Spirit, by whom, in all things, the Apostles professed to be guided and assisted. It was found impossible, however, within the limited compass of the present volume, to afford a view of the subject at all adequate to its importance. The consequence is, that the discussion of it is intended to be given to the public in a separate form, bearing the following title, "The Gospel Schekinah, or the Divine Personality of the Holy Spirit and his Omnipotent Agency in the Church, essential to the Establishment and Consummation of the Reign of Messiah."

In reply to the inquiries of some of his friends, whether or not he could supply a

similar history to the present of all the apostolical Churches, the Author begs to say, that should his present attempt meet with acceptance, it shall be his endeavour, circumstances admitting, to complete a history of Primitive Christianity by the publication of such a volume.

CONTENTS.

Chapter	Page
I. Christ's Farewell Direction to his Disciples	1
II. Introduction of the Gospel into Philippi -	18
III. Subsequent history of the Church at Philippi - - - - -	38
IV. The doctrines and conduct of the Philippian Christians.—Jesus Christ the object of their faith and love - - - - -	64
V. Their novel attitude with respect to God and their eternal destiny - - - - -	88
VI. Their communion with the saints - - -	109
VII. Their nonconformity to the world - - -	131
VIII. Their conduct under affliction - - -	148
IX. Their anticipation of the second advent of Christ - - - - -	168
X. The character of the first ministers of the gospel - - - - -	182
XI. Supplementary notes and observations - -	207
1. The present state of Philippi - - -	207
2. The canonical Scriptures of the early Christians - - - - -	209
3. Polycarp's epistle to the Philippians -	215
4. The observance of the Lord's Supper by the early Christians - - - -	222
5. The schools of the early Christians -	227
6. The number of the early Christians -	228
7. The difference between primitive and modern Christians - - - - -	230

The following Chronological Lists are prefixed, that reference may at once be made to the time in which the Authors mentioned in this volume flourished, or to that in which the contemporary Roman emperors reigned.

<i>The principal Christian writers of the first four Centuries.</i>		<i>The Roman Emperors, from Augustine to Constantine.*</i>	
	A. D.		A. D.
Clement, of Rome . . .	70	Augustus	14
Dionysius, Areop. . . .	70	Tiberius	37
Ignatius, of Antioch . .	100	Caligula	41
Polycarp, of Smyrna . .	130	Claudius	54
Justin, the Martyr . . .	155	* Nero	69
Athenagoras	170	Vespasian	79
Dionysius, of Corinth . .	172	Titus	81
Theophilus, of Antioch .	180	* Domitian	96
Irenæus	184	Nerva	98
Tertullian	198	* Trajan	117
Clement, of Alexandria .	204	Adrian	138
Minutius Felix	230	Antoninus Pius	161
Origen	230	* Mark Antony	180
Gregory	250	Commodus	193
Cyprian	250	* Severus	211
Lactantius	300	Caracalla and Geta . .	222
Eusebius	329	Alexander Severus . . .	235
Athanasius	350	Maximinus and Maximus .	251
Ambrose	370	* Decius	254
Basil	370	* Valerian	260
Gregory Nazianzen	370	Licinus	284
——— Nyssen.	380	* Diocletian	286
Chrysostom	400	* Maximinian	304
Jerome	400	Constantius, &c.	312
		Constantine	

* What are termed the *Ten Persecutions*, occurred in the reigns of those emperors to each of whose names an asterisk is prefixed. Two of those persons are to be assigned to the reign of Trajan.

A LETTER

To the Author, from the Rev. John Pye Smith, D.D.

“HAVING carefully read a large part of your work, ‘The Church at Philippi, or the Doctrines and Conduct of the Early Christians illustrated,’ I readily express my humble opinion, that it is a work which contains much valuable information, particularly in the historical and literary appendix, and which is well calculated to advance ‘godly edifying in love,’ and in all the fruits of vital Christianity. There are a few oversights in minute circumstances, neither could I pledge myself to support every interpretation that is introduced of particular Scripture passages. I chiefly refer to some which occur in Chapter IX. on ‘The Second Advent of Christ.’ You appear to understand the symbolical pictures of prophecy literally, as if they were to be fulfilled by physical convulsions of nature; and you make no hesitation in regarding our Lord’s prediction in Matthew xxiv. as referring to the last judgment. Yet it should be remembered that your interpretations have on their side many expositors and divines eminent for learning and piety. The circulation of your work will not be small if it take place in proportion to its instructive, awakening, and consolatory tendency. This I cordially wish.”

Homerton, Dec. 28th, 1833.

THE
CHURCH AT PHILIPPI,

&c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

**CHRIST'S FAREWELL DIRECTION TO HIS
DISCIPLES.**

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

MATTHEW XXVIII. 19.

A LAST farewell ! a last farewell with a best friend ! Nothing that belongs exclusively to humanity, can be conceived more truly sacred, or more deeply affecting. But the farewell of the first disciples with their Master and Lord was without a parallel ; it was not only the last adieu of the truest,

the purest friendship ; it was more, infinitely more ; it was the last adieu of a few devoted followers of the Friend of Sinners, with their condescending Redeemer, and their covenanted God.

An example this of *sorrowing love*, to which there never hath been, nor ever can be, any compare. Jesus had presented himself to his disciples in all his endearing character : he had borne with their infirmities and their infidelities ; and his faithfulness to themselves, and to the great object of his mission, he had sealed with his blood. They had witnessed, both towards themselves, and towards all with whom he had had intercourse, the holy and heavenly deportment of that illustrious individual, of whom even a noted sceptic bears this testimony :—
“ Among the traits which charm me in the character of Jesus, are not only the sweetness, the simplicity, but also the ease, the grace, and even elegance of his manners : had he not have been the wisest of mortals, he had been the most amiable :”—they had been eye-witnesses to his career of benevo-

volence; they had themselves abundantly participated in the emanations of his love; they had been instructed from his own lips, and by his immaculate example; they had seen how he bare the contradiction of sinners; and their eyes had been suffused, and their hearts had been convulsed, by the sad spectacle of his ultimate passion. Yes, their heavenly friend and benefactor had been for them, and for the guilty sons of Adam, exposed to reproach and sufferings the most cruel and relentless. His enemies had conducted him in triumph through the streets of the sacred city; that city in which he had exhibited so many of his wonderful works; over whose inhabitants he had so recently wept, and whose infidelity he had so feelingly deplored. Ah! how grievously was he requited for all his good-will and benevolent doings! Strange infatuation! unprincipled bigotry!

Is He, who bears yon massy cross, surrounded by a clamorous multitude, who triumph over the weary pilgrim, as though they were leading captive their most bitter

enemy; is that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, the Son of the Highest? See! they drag him to Golgotha! Hark! he speaks. Utters he righteous imprecations on the ungrateful crowd? Ah, no! his countenance bespeaks not indignation: he only whispers in accents of consolation to his sympathizing friends, "Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me."

But look! the concourse ascend the hill! the rude altar is placed upon the ground! the holy victim is extended on the cross! O horrible barbarity! big nails are driven through his hands and his feet; the crimson blood starts from the rugged wounds; a livid paleness overspreads that placid face. The work of death proceeds; the divine sufferer is raised; the cross is fixed in the opened earth; the Son of Man is lifted up; creation groans at the mysterious doom of its omnipotent Lord; the sun veils his splendour, and refuses to witness the fearful scene; the earth trembles and shakes; the stubborn rocks are rent; the ghastly dead, arising from their graves, stalk through the

accursed city, and haunt its guilty inmates.

Such indeed was the fate of the disciples' friend, who, when they had obtained his mangled body, and had placed it in a quiet tomb, with it buried all their expectations. "They had hoped that it had been he who should have redeemed Israel," but his premature and ignominious death had blasted all their anticipations; and many of them, in complete despondency, returned sorrowing to their homes, and resumed their former occupations.

The holy women, however, had assigned themselves the task of embalming his precious remains. "And very early in the morning, the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre, at the rising of the sun." But a difficulty presented itself which they had not foreseen; and whilst with apprehension of disappointment in the execution of their pious design they inquired, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" they found, upon approaching sufficiently near, "that

the stone was rolled away ; and entering into the sepulchre, they saw an angel sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment," who announced to them the wondrous news of their Lord's resurrection, and who directed them to go and inform his disciples of the joyful intelligence, and that he had already gone before them into Galilee, where they would meet him.

"The Lord is risen ! the Lord is risen indeed !" was a fact soon delightfully verified. Soon was the sadness of the weeping disciples turned into joy, and soon were their hearts made "to burn within them ;" for hastening down to Galilee, what was their astonishment, what their rejoicing, when their eyes saw him for themselves and not for another ! By the delightful assurance of his resurrection their hopes were again revived, their convictions respecting his divinity were confirmed, and their attachment to his sacred person was rendered indissoluble. And now whilst he appeared more dignified, and exhibited more unequivocal characteristics of his Godhead, he

manifested, if possible, more condescension, more love towards his devoted followers ; he instructed them yet more fully in the mysteries of his kingdom ; he opened their understandings that they might understand the Scriptures ; he showed them how it behoved Christ to suffer and to rise again, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, “ beginning at Jerusalem.” Transient, however, was his visit ; he abode amongst them as a dear friend, as it were, but for a night ; the morning dawned which must part him from them for ever on earth. On that memorable morning, he walked out, attended by his beloved disciples, who drank in the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, and whose attention was affectionately rivetted on his wonderful person, as he directed his steps towards that mount from whence he had taught lessons of heavenly wisdom, where he had frequently both wept and rejoiced with his followers, and where he had often retired to hold mysterious converse with the skies. . And as “ he led them out as far

as to Bethany," the sun, it may be presumed, shed forth its most splendid rays, rejoicing with the rest of creation to congratulate its Lord in the approaching assumption of all his native dignity and glory. There it was that he enjoined his farewell direction, and that he uttered his last gracious promise: "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you, but tarry ye in Jerusalem, until ye be endowed with power from on high; for ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth." And there it was that "it came to pass, that while he blessed them, he was parted from them: a cloud received him out of their sight."

Thus, the poor bereaved disciples were once more involved in grief; and fixing their eyes with fear and astonishment upon the ascending cloud, they gazed thereon until it became lost in the ethereal space. Nor was it till two celestial messengers assured them of the reality of the scene which they had

just witnessed, and of the future re-appearance of their Lord in like manner, that they could call their attention from the direction in which their exalted Friend had disappeared.

“Then they returned to Jerusalem.” Ah! who can describe the feelings that now agitated their bosoms? they had bid a last farewell to their best, their heavenly Friend: they did not now indeed sorrow as those without hope; but, in the meantime, they were deprived of a kind instructor, of a sanctifying companion, and of an indulgent and affectionate friend; and were again exposed, like destitute orphans, to the derision and malice of their prejudiced countrymen. Affectionate regret at the departure of their Saviour, would doubtless be the absorbing sentiment of their hearts. How would they charge their memories with the engaging person and the lovely attributes that composed the character of their ascended Lord! How, as they slowly retraced the path consecrated by the recent pressure of his footsteps, would they break the deep silence

which their unparelled situation had naturally imposed, by ejaculations in commendation of all his loveliness, and of all his worth ! Oh, what a scene ! how affecting, and how instructive ! But follow the mourning company in their return to the city : to them it is now in vain that the Orient sun appears in the firmament, as a bridegroom prepared to run his race ; that the fields, on either hand, present the gay livery of enlivening spring ; or that the feathered tenants of the grove hymn, on restless wing, their cheerful matins : they observe nothing in all they see, and in all they hear, but what accords with the melancholy which overspreads their present and their future prospects. And, ah ! with what different sensations do they enter the gate of the city, than those with which they had so recently gone forth, in company with Him whose loss they now so deeply deplore, and whose absence, to their apprehensions, enshrouds every object in a gloom deeper than that of night.

On the occasion of the betrayal of their Master, fearful of being involved in his mis-

fortunes, his disciples forsook him and fled. Far different, however, was their conduct now that they had received such palpable evidence of the divinity of his person and of his mission, and had experienced such marked displays of his condescension and love. Instead of being guilty of unbelief and apostacy, they now exhibited the beautiful characteristic of *loving obedience*; in place of each departing to his own home, as they had formerly done, they now sought the residence of some of the brethren, who lived in Jerusalem; and there they resolved to tarry, in consonance with their Lord's direction, (Acts i. 12, 14.) There they remained unobserved or despised by men, but the objects of the peculiar regard of their exalted Redeemer: there, in holy converse, were their hearts expanded in love and reverence to Jesus, and in esteem for each other; and there they waited, in devout expectation, the fulfilment of his last gracious promise.

The Saviour had declared, that it was expedient that he should go away: but he

promised them another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. He had told them that he was about to return to his Father, but he assured them he would not leave them comfortless. In this their sacred retirement, therefore, they would naturally call to mind the various hints he had formerly given them of his approaching departure; and as one and another of their number recalled the promises that had accompanied those intimations, they would unite in humble entreaty for their speedy accomplishment. Thus it was that they continued, as the inspired historian observes, "with one accord in prayer." What a blessed company! They were all of one mind, all actuated by one motive, all devoted to one object. The Lord had requested them to tarry in Jerusalem, and there await the promised Comforter; they obey his injunction, and that in a manner which involved in it a development of the purest principles of the religion of Christ. Not only do they tarry in Jerusalem, but they abide together as one family, continue with one accord, and thus yield

obedience, not merely to the injunction in question, but with it to the new commandment, "Little children, love one another."

To Christians, in all ages, this short and affecting history exhibits a lesson the most wholesome and instructive. The interesting object of the disciple's solicitude appears therein in a light at once imposing and sublime. The veil that had hitherto obscured the Godhead of the Saviour was from the period of his resurrection removed to such a degree, that no mortal besides his favoured friends was allowed to behold him. To them, notwithstanding the beauty and the glory of his attire, and the express dignity of his person, he conducted himself with all the familiarity and all the affability of the sincerest friendship. So far was he from upbraiding them with their recent infidelity and apostasy, that he studiously shunned every appearance of being aware of it; it was never so much as manifested, in his bearing towards them, that he knew them to have been guilty of it. What true love did this oblivion of their wrong towards an indulgent master—a best

friend, display ! How would his silence on a subject which must have pressed heavily upon their consciences, have touched the finest chords of their hearts ! Yea, that very disciple who had been most strenuous in the denial of him, was expressly named in the tender message that he sent to them immediately after his resurrection ; and, Oh ! who can conceive all that was contained in the tacit forgiveness which that message conveyed ! The conduct, indeed, of the said disciple, from that moment, may in some measure suggest its import.

And is not Jesus the same yesterday, to day, and for ever ? Has he not still on earth his devoted followers, and his cherished, though oftentimes wavering disciples ? He has : and he will be with them by his Spirit to the end of time. To them, and to every successive generation of true believers, he will bear himself as he did towards his earliest friends. He still carries the lambs in his bosom, still leads his flock into green pastures, and conducts them to living streams : his promise never has failed, it

never can fail, "*I will not leave you comfortless.*"

How interesting, too, the conduct manifested by the disciples on the memorable occasion of their Lord's ascension ! When first the intelligence of the Redeemer's resurrection from the dreary abode of death, assailed their astonished ears, they could not believe ; not because they were unwilling to do so ; not altogether because they conceived the fact to be incredible ; but because the news was too delightful, too welcome to appear true ; "they could not believe for joy." And what was their conduct when they actually beheld Him whom their souls loved ? Why, it was evident from the whole of it, during his brief sojourn with them, that had they had the assurance of his unvarying presence, they would gladly have made this transient earth their eternal abode. Their language was then similar to that of a disciple on a former occasion, "It is good for us to be here."

And behold them after their Lord had ascended up on high. They ponder his last

impressive words in their hearts ; they forget not their duty in the abundance of their grief. No ; they yield unhesitating obedience to his farewell direction, they return to Jerusalem, and there await, in prayerful expectation, the accomplishment of his promise. That promise fulfilled,—endued according to his word with power from on high by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon them, they fearlessly go forth, proclaiming to Jew and to Gentile, to bond and to free, the unsearchable riches of Christ. They hasten to fulfil the divine injunction, “GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD, AND PREACH THE GOSPEL TO EVERY CREATURE.”

And is it not the duty, is it not the privilege of the friends of Jesus in every age, to experience something of the same nearness, the same spirit of attachment to their exalted Lord ? It is ; “Lo,” says he, “I am with you always. Abide in me and I in you, and ye shall ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”

O for a share of the same spirit which actuated those sainted characters ! “We have

not, because we ask not." If Christians, generally, were to occupy themselves less in unprofitable speculations ; if they would rather seek to count all things loss for the sake of Christ ; and, like the early disciples, seek to love and obey the Saviour, what would be the result ? Discord and dissention would be unknown ; the time occupied in unhallowed disputation would be redeemed, for purposes of personal improvement in all the lovely graces of Christianity, and in labours and prayers for the extension of the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ; and Jesus himself would reign in the hearts and in the abodes of his people.

CHAPTER II.

INTRODUCTION OF THE GOSPEL INTO PHILIPPI.

“A vision appeared to Paul in the night : there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us.”—Acts xvi. 9.

FROM the memorable day of Pentecost, the day on which was visibly fulfilled the oft repeated promise of the gift of the Holy Ghost, the apostles, and the disciples of Jesus Christ were successful in their endeavours to propagate the facts and doctrines of the gospel to an extent that must have appeared marvellous, even to themselves. Such was the power of eloquence with which the subject as well as the Spirit of God endowed them, that the very first discourse that was uttered in defence of themselves and of the truths which they professed, carried conviction to the minds of no fewer than three thousand souls, whom the sacred historian declares continued steadfastly in

the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer ! And by the same means, and under a similar influence, five thousand are recorded on a subsequent occasion to have heard the word and to have believed : and indeed from that period forward, it is stated in the brief but interesting account of the "Acts of the Apostles," that "the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

From Jerusalem the apostles, and holy persons delegated by them, went forth from city to city declaring the truth of the gospel with a courage and resolution which no opposition from the reasonings of the wise, or persecutions from the malignity of infatuated ignorance, could possibly subdue ; and numerous are the names of places, both in Asia, Africa, and Europe, which after the lapse of a very few years are found mentioned in the pages of ecclesiastical history, as having been visited by Christian missionaries, and as possessing within them congregations of Christian believers. And certainly few subjects can be conceived as offering a

more interesting field of research, than the history of the first planting of the Christian religion in some of those places, and the subsequent history of those churches.

The Evangelist Luke, who, in his account of the Acts of the Apostles, has given a brief history of the marvellous progress of the Gospel in his own time, informs us that, with Silas and Timothy, he accompanied the apostle Paul in the great missionary tour that included his first visit to the city of Philippi. It would appear that St. Paul had once before travelled through a part of Macedonia, formerly one of the states of Greece, without having stopped to preach the Gospel; but that now, arriving in its vicinity again, and no doubt intending as formerly to pass on, he received divine intimation, through the medium of a dream, to extend the object of his mission to that part of the continent. At Troas, "a vision appeared to Paul in the night: there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia and help us." It is not impossible but that upon the

former journey of the apostle through that country, an application similar to that of the vision had been actually made to him, but that his circumstances and other appointments were such, that he might not then have deemed himself warranted to stay. But whatever might have been the plans of the apostle on this occasion with regard to his journey, he had no sooner seen the vision and given an account of it to his fellow apostles, than they immediately resolved to go to Macedonia, "assuredly gathering," says St. Luke, "that the Lord had called them to preach the Gospel there." Accordingly they sailed from Troas, and experiencing favourable weather, they passed Samothracia, an island in the Mediterranean Sea, and the next day passing Neapolis, a seaport of Macedonia, they sailed up the river Strymon to Philippi.

It is said that the ancient name of this city was Crenides, and that it probably took its name from the springs or fountains which there arose, being built upon a hill; and that it was afterwards called Datus, on

account of the gold mines in its immediate neighbourhood. The name Philippi it received from having been enlarged and greatly improved by Philip, King of Macedon, the father of Alexander the Great. Subsequently Greece became reduced to a province of the Roman Empire, and from some ancient coins and inscriptions compared with the pages of the Roman historians; it appears that Julius Cæsar first planted a colony at Philippi, and that his son and successor Augustus augmented it by transporting thither some of the inhabitants of those towns in Italy who had united with his opponent, Mark Antony.¹ It is further noted as having been the scene of two sanguinary battles, in the first of which Pompey was defeated by Julius Cæsar, and in the other, Brutus and Cassius were defeated by Augustus.

It does not appear that there was a single Christian believer to welcome the arrival of

¹ In Vaillant's *Numismata*, vol. i. page 160, there is a coin inscribed, Col. Jul. Aug. Phil., and in Sponius' *Miscellanies*, page 173, may be seen a fac simile of a stone inscribed Col. Jul. Philippensis.

the apostles into Philippi: like the rest of the cities of Greece, its inhabitants were wholly given to idolatry; so that they were left to introduce themselves and their errand as opportunity might serve. It was the usual custom of Paul, when he first arrived at a place, in accordance with our Lord's direction, to go first to the lost sheep of the house of Israel: in other words, if there were any of the Jewish persuasion to be found, he immediately repaired to their synagogue: especially was it his practice to employ the seventh day or Jewish sabbath in visiting the places of worship in which the people of that nation were congregated. In Philippi there dwelt so few Jews that they possessed no synagogue. When such happened to be the case, or when they were too poor to bear the expense, or, as it often happened, they were prohibited from having one by the magistracy, they had instead thereof an oratory or proseucha, which consisted of an open court like one of the courts of the temple, generally situated either by the side of a river or the sea shore, and sur-

rounded by a grove of trees, to serve as a shelter from the rays of an eastern sun, or from sudden rain.

These spots Dr. Lardner supposes to have been preferred, as either possessing a purer atmosphere, or as offering greater convenience for water,—an article so indispensable in their sacrificial services. In one of these oratories it was that our Lord is supposed to have spent a whole night in prayer, prior to his election of the twelve disciples. (Luke vi. 12.) And of this description was the place of Jewish worship at Philippi. Thither, on the sabbath after their arrival, the apostle Paul repaired, with his companions in holy enterprize. And there it was, that seating themselves among those assembled, who were chiefly women, they first embraced the opportunity of preaching the doctrines of Christ in that city. Amongst those who, upon that occasion, listened to the discourse of the apostles, was one who heard with absorbing interest the novel tidings which they announced. This was Lydia, a native of

Thyatira,¹ a proselyte of the gate; one who worshipped the true God, but did not conform to all the Jewish ceremonies. The religion which she professed taught her, with the rest of the believers in the Mosaic economy, to expect the fulfilment of the promises relative to the Messiah; and for that fulfilment, it is probable, she had been devoutly waiting, even as did Simeon,

¹ An inscription has been found among the ruins of Thyatira, which corroborates the fact that this city once had a trade of this sort, which maintained an incorporated society of its own.

ΑΤΑΘΗ ΤΥΧΗ
ΑΝΤ.ΚΑ.ΑΛΦΗΝΟΝ ΑΡΙΤΝΩ ΤΟΝ
ΚΡΑΤΙΣΤΟΝ ΕΠΙΤΡΟΠΟΝ ΤΟΥ ΣΕΒ
.....
.....
.....ΤΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΣΕΜΝΟΤΑΤΟΝ ΙΕΡΕΑ ΤΟΥ ΓΙΟ
ΠΟΛΕΟΣ ΘΕΟΥ ΤΥΡΙΜ ΝΟΥ
ΟΙ ΒΑΦΕΙΣ.

Spon. Miscell. Erudit. Antiq. p. 113.

"I know not if other travellers have remarked, that, even at the present time, Thyatira is famous for dyeing. I was informed, that the clothes that are dyed scarlet here, are considered superior to any other furnished by Asia Minor; and that large quantities are sent weekly to Smyrna, for the purposes of commerce."

Hartley's Visit to the Apocalyptic Churches.

and Anna, and other sincere servants of God. Acquainted with the predictions that related to his advent, with what wonder would she receive the intelligence communicated by these Jewish strangers—how would her heart burn within her whilst one declared that himself had frequently seen and conversed with the Saviour; another of them, that he had actually had the honour of having been one of his chosen disciples; whilst another, in recounting the story of his own conversion, stated how he had once so utterly despised and rejected the claims of Jesus of Nazareth, that he had actually been engaged in persecuting his followers to the death—how that, in the very act of executing a murderous commission, with which he had been intrusted by his infatuated countrymen, he had been arrested by a vision of the glorified Immanuel; and that thus vanquished into the faith he had hitherto sought to destroy, he had become, by divine appointment, an ambassador for Christ, and that, even in his present visit to the city of Philippi, he was act-

ing in immediate compliance with a supernatural intimation! O yes, the tidings of the advent of "Israel's consolation" would fall like a flood of light and of joy upon the mind of Lydia, "whose heart," observes, with beautiful simplicity, the inspired evangelist, who himself was present upon the occasion, "the Lord opened, that she attended to the things which were spoken of Paul."

In holy converse upon the interesting facts and doctrines of the Gospel, Paul and his associates were conducted to the house of their convert. No mention is made in the evangelical history as to whether Lydia was a married person, but the presumption is that she either was so, or was a widow, since we are informed that she immediately introduced these messengers of salvation to the members of her household; and what is more, they all embraced the truth, and received the rite of Christian baptism, as a sign and a pledge of their sincere conversion; and thus they became the nucleus of the future church of Christian believers at Philippi.

Here, therefore, was a spot reclaimed from the moral wilderness, an oasis in the desert—here was a family of individuals with whom the Apostles could now sympathize, and with whom they could take sweet counsel, concerning the comforts and influence of divine grace in their personal experience, as well as to the means to be employed in enlarging and perpetuating the interests of the Redeemer in the neighbourhood: nor could any assurance of the reality of the conversion of this interesting family be more satisfactory, than the exhibition of the grateful emotions raised in their bosoms towards the persons to whom, as the human agents of their happy change, they stood indebted. No longer were the Apostles now allowed to remain comfortless strangers in the houses of the heathen. “If,” says Lydia, appealing to the position in which her family now stood, both with reference to God and to his servants, “ye have judged me faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and there abide.” And, thus “constrained,” as the evangelist St. Luke terms it, they there abode for several days.

It happened one day, as St. Paul and his friends were going from the house of Lydia to the proseucha or court for worship, by the river side, a maid servant met them, who was supposed to be possessed with a spirit of divination; perhaps she was a lunatic, persons labouring under that malady having been considered as under the influence of Pythean Apollo, or a spirit of prophesying. She had heard something concerning the character and motives of the Apostles, which had doubtless soon become the common topic of conversation in the city—and turning back, she followed them, continuing to exclaim, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” But this testimony, just and appropriate as it would otherwise have been, the apostle valued not, as proceeding from such a source: they consequently took no notice of her ravings, until, having been thus disturbed and molested for several days, the apostle Paul at length turned towards her, and by an impulse from above, said to the spirit by which she was possessed,

“I command thee, in the name of Jesus Christ, to come out of her.” And from that moment her lunatic affection was cured—she was dispossessed.

By this circumstance, however, the apostles became involved in trouble; for when her masters found that the gains which they had been used to make by her ravings were at an end, they laid hold of Paul and Silas, and dragged them to the forum, the place of public judicature, and there charged them with raising tumults in the city, and, as being Jews, teaching customs unlawful for Romans to observe. In consequence of these accusations, they were sentenced to be scourged, and to be cast into the securest part of the prison; to which indignities the jailer added that of confining them in the stocks.

It may be profitable to pause, and to follow in spirit these holy men to their dreary abode. Do we observe them dejected at their sad condition? Do we hear them utter sentiments of regret for being thus impeded in their apostolical labours, or at the prosecu-

tion of those labours subjecting them to such unmerited contumely? Ah, no: for such treatment they are entirely prepared; they have duly estimated the value of the reproach of the world, in comparison with the approval of their God, and the weight of glory to be hereafter awarded to the faithful; they not only tell us that they rejoice in being counted worthy to suffer for the cause of their Divine Master, but they actually burst forth in songs of praise, and in accents of prayer and thanksgiving to the God whom they serve, so that their fellow-prisoners are made to hear the strange sounds of Christian melody break upon the gloomy stillness of a prison midnight. Ah! their conduct may have subjected them to the derision and to the persecution of men, but it is approved on high; and even now, in the hour of their apparent disgrace, that promise of their Lord is eminently fulfilled, "Lo, I am with you alway:" even here their spirits sweetly commune with him, in whose service they are engaged, and for whose cause they are thus exposed: and at the

same time that he gives his devoted servants an assurance of his approval, he accompanies it with one of the most public and awful testimonies to the divinity of the doctrines which they came to proclaim, that was ever made under the dispensation of the gospel; for whilst the Apostles were thus engaged, and the unhappy inmates of the same solitary abode were listening in silence to the voices of these their singular companions in durance, suddenly, in a moment, the prison rocked to its foundations—an earthquake tore away every bolt from its place—the doors were thrown open, and “every one’s hands were loosed.”

Awakened by the shock, and observing the prison doors open, without having ascertained the precise cause, and judging of course that all the prisoners had effected their escape, the jailer was just about to forestall the judgment of his employers, by having recourse to what was considered by the Romans, in cases of emergency, a virtuous course; he drew out his sword, and would have committed self-murder, had he

not been surprised by Paul, who, observing his approach, and perhaps overhearing what might have escaped from his lips, addressed him with a loud voice, saying, "Do thyself no harm: for we are all here." The man, astonished to find that he was observed, and more so that the person so vehemently expressing anxiety to save him from destruction, was one of the prisoners whom he had just before so harshly treated, called quickly for a light, by which to assure his senses of the fact of their being actually there. Trembling with conflicting emotions, he fell down before Paul and Silas, and bringing them out, he learned from themselves the particulars of the fearful catastrophe. Struck with the calm and dignified behaviour of the Apostles, and convinced at once that the earthquake was intended as a divine interposition in behalf of themselves and their doctrines, he became tenfold more alarmed at his condition as a sinner before the living and the true God, than he had been before for the consequences that threatened his apparent want of vigilance with

respect to the prisoners committed to his keeping : and in the language of the utmost penitence, immediately and anxiously instituted the inquiry, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

What a change, and how suddenly effected ! With what pleasure would the Apostles mark the revolution that had taken place in the sentiments and emotions of the man, who had so recently exhibited a conduct so much in character with the obdurate tendency of his occupation ; and how promptly did they fulfil their apostolical calling, by directing him to the only refuge for the penitent mind : "Believe," said they, "on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Divine grace accompanied the words of the Apostles. Not only did the jailer receive and rely on the life-giving truth, but with him also the members of his family, who had surrounded the holy men of God, and, like him, had become awakened to a sense of their true condition, and of the importance of the doctrines which were advanced. In consequence of their conversion, they were

immediately received by the appointed rite of baptism into the Christian church. And now the jailer, no longer fearing the resentment of the magistrates, but, with the profession, acquiring also the fortitude of a Christian, endeavoured by all possible means to prove his love and veneration for the Apostles: heedless of the consequence, he conducted them to his own apartments, and there washed their stripes, and set meat before them. And thus, in witnessing the joy that beamed in the countenances of their host,—for it is observed by the inspired historian, that “the jailer rejoiced, believing in God with all his house,”—how great would be the consolation of those sainted men, to find that the very circumstance of their imprisonment had proved subservient to the purpose for which they had visited the city of Philippi.

It is pretty evident that the earthquake, in conjunction with the singular character of the Apostles and their recent persecution, had created a considerable sensation throughout the city; for the morning had

but little advanced ere messengers arrived from the magistrates, ordering the immediate dismissal of Paul and Silas. When, however, they were thus informed, and desired to depart, they resolved that it should be known that not only had the magistrates used them with cruelty, but that they had acted illegally. Paul, therefore, spiritedly addressed the messengers, saying, "They have beaten us openly, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay, verily; but let them come themselves, and fetch us out." And so they did: for, fearing the consequences of having thus acted towards them, it being unlawful to inflict the punishment of scourging upon Romans, or to condemn them without going through the proper forms of trial, they actually "came themselves, and besought them, and desired them to depart out of the city."

Thus honourably dismissed, Paul and Silas went straightway to the house of Lydia, where were still abiding the apostles Luke and Timothy, who, of course, received them

with open arms, and with every demonstration of love and of joy. The various converts had been already there, awaiting the fate of their apostolic fathers and friends, or were soon brought together, to whom the Apostles related the occurrences of the night; and after having exhorted them all to constancy in their new profession, and having solemnly commended them to the divine protection and blessing, they peacefully departed to preach the gospel in other parts, leaving behind them, as the fruit of their labours and sufferings, a goodly company of Christian believers.

CHAPTER III.

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF PHILIPPI.

“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world: holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”—Phil. ii. 15, 16.

THE gospel, which had been first preached by the Apostle Paul at Philippi, in the year of Christ 51, continued, after he left that city, to spread its benign and saving influence. The number of its converts, from both its Jewish and heathen population, continued to increase, and great grace rested upon its entire church of Christian believers. They had received the truth in the love of it, and they had continued to walk in all the ordinances of Christian fellowship blameless. And as it often happens that the principal members of a community impress their spirit upon the rest, and exert a marked influence

upon their temper and conduct, so in the present instance, whilst the amiable Lydia and her family may have tended to foster among their believing brethren, the spirit of love for which that church became so much characterized, so the prompt and fearless temperament of the jailer, both of whom were among the earliest Philippian converts, may have had the effect of keeping alive in the church the warm zeal of Christian philanthropy.

The memory of the individual to whom they were principally indebted for the introduction of the gospel among them, was eminently cherished; his name was often upon their lips, and they caused it to be revered by their children, as well as by every new convert to their ranks; they sent messengers to him once and again, both when he sojourned in Macedonia and also in Thessalonica; they made among themselves subscriptions, according to their means, and requested his acceptance of their offerings of love; they rejoiced in the success that in every place attended his

labours, and they coveted the honour of aiding him to defray the expenses consequent upon his frequent and extensive travels. Every opportunity was embraced of maintaining a correspondence as useful and honourable to themselves, as it must have been gratifying and refreshing to the mind of the Apostle. And thus, even his absence afforded them occasion for cherishing their sympathy with him in his various toils and trials, and for expressing the promptings of their gratitude and liberality.

From the absence of the historian from about the person of St. Paul at the time, no mention is made in the Acts of the Apostles of any particular occurrence that transpired during the visit which the Apostle subsequently made to Philippi upon the occasion of his three months' journey through Greece, Acts xx. ; yet of this we may be assured, that the person who had been the means of introducing them to the knowledge and to the grace which they possessed, would be received as an angel of God ; that every one would vie with his brother in

expressions of pleasure at his arrival ; that those of them who had been introduced by his own hands to the fellowship of saints, would hasten to testify their veneration for his person, and to afford him the happiness of receiving the assurance from their own lips of their steadfastness in the faith ; and that they who had since believed, and had become united to the church, would rejoice at the opportunity of seeing for themselves an individual concerning whom they would have heard such frequent and heartfelt commendations, and whom they had been taught to regard as the founder of the society of Christians in that city. And to an ardent mind, like that of the Apostle, the circumstances under which he again visited them, must have been personally interesting to a high degree. When he had come to the same city but a few years before, no hand had been extended, no voice had been heard to welcome his arrival ; there were none that either knew how, or who cared to sympathize with him : whereas he now found himself surrounded by countenances beam-

ing with affection for him, and by individuals listening to his discourse with all the earnestness of the most willing discipleship. And to him who so eminently "had the care of all the churches upon him," what gratification would it afford to enter into all the affairs of the one which he had so recently established, and which had fulfilled his most sanguine hopes, by a constant increase both in numbers and in grace.

From Philippi,¹ Acts xx. 6, the Apostle departed to meet the companions of his journey who awaited him at Troas, for the purpose of proceeding through various towns to Jerusalem, where he wished to arrive by a particular period. And thus having, with such amazing success, preached the gospel in Judea and on the continent of Asia, and in the peninsula and islands of Greece, St. Paul had often expressed his

¹ It is found stated in the notes at the close of both the epistles to the Corinthians, as ordinarily printed, that they were directed from Philippi. It is the opinion of Dr. Macknight that the first was written in Ephesus; the other was certainly written in Macedonia, and probably at Philippi.

desire to pass into Italy, and announce the faith of which he was such a zealous advocate in that city whose palaces, and theatres, and forums, and triumphal monuments, testified it the imperial city, the mistress of the world; and where were congregated, from the ends of the earth, the ambitious for wealth or for fame; and where resided the Cæsars who had fought their way to empire; and where flourished the orators, and the poets, and the philosophers, who in their various professions are thought in some respects to have reached the very limits of human genius. Not that when he thus anticipated his desire of "preaching the gospel to them that were at Rome also," he appeared to have apprehended that his visit to that city would be in the character of a prisoner ignominiously chained to a soldier. Such, however, proved to be the fact; and no sooner was the circumstance announced to his friends at Philippi, than with their usual promptitude of zeal, they immediately adopted measures to testify the deep sympathy which they entertained for their

father in the gospel. Again they brought together their offerings; and not satisfied with intrusting them to the hands of an ordinary messenger, they dispatched Epaphroditus, one of the pastors of their own church: this they did, not merely to manifest their love and veneration for the Apostle, but that they might thereby be able through him, to inform him of their own estate, and to obtain precise intelligence as to the condition of St. Paul, and as to the probabilities of what the event of his confinement might prove: besides this, he was charged with the mournful duty of remaining, during the Apostle's pleasure, near to his person, and of rendering him all the aid that his trying case required.

Upon the arrival of Epaphroditus in Rome, he found the Apostle still in durance; not, indeed, detained in a common gaol, as he had been upon the occasion of his first visit to Philippi, but residing in apartments hired by himself, attended constantly by a soldier. And, although restrained from prosecuting his mighty designs by traversing from place

to place, yet was he found unremittingly, and with all confidence, engaged in embracing every opportunity of "preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus ; no man forbidding him." His character and doctrines soon became objects of public notoriety ; for, besides the interest that his arrival occasioned among those who, in Rome, were already members of the church of Christ, he had been accompanied on his way thither by more than two hundred persons, who, during the journey, had witnessed the holiness of his deportment, and the divine interposition in his favour, both in the circumstance of the shipwreck, and in the miracle at Miletus.

As usual, the brethren of the Apostle according to the flesh, the Jews, occupied his first solicitude upon his arrival at Rome. To them he fully stated the cause of his imprisonment, declaring that he had committed nothing against the laws of the Empire, or the customs of the Jews ; yet, said he, "was I delivered a prisoner from Jerusalem.

into the hands of the Romans." "And, having appointed a day, there came many to him, into his lodging, to whom, from the morning until evening, he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets." Indignant, however, at the cavilling spirit with which his doctrine was received, he closed by exclaiming, "Well spake the Holy Ghost by Isaiah, the prophet, unto our fathers, saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing, ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing, ye shall see, and not perceive: for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed, lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. Be it known, therefore, unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles."

And thus in this, as in many former instances, the Jews having rejected his testimony, he immediately turned his attention

to the population of Rome in general; and consoling indeed must it have been to his mind, that there, as elsewhere, success so eminently attended his labours; and that, notwithstanding the desponding fears which his friends in Philippi appear to have indulged as to the presumed loss which his imprisonment would occasion to the church, he could exult in the fact, that "the things that had happened unto him had fallen out unto the furtherance of the gospel; so that his bonds in Christ were manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; and that many of his brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by his bonds, were rendered bold to speak the word without fear." Philip. i. 12—14.

But Epaphroditus had not long had the privilege of witnessing the happy results of the unrepresible ardour of the Apostle's character, even under the cheerless circumstance of imprisonment, before "he fell sick, and was nigh unto death." The tenderness of this person's spirit, and consequently his fitness for the interesting com-

mission with which he had been intrusted, is discoverable from the circumstance of his having been "filled with heaviness," when informed that his friends at Philippi had come to the knowledge of his sickness. And, indeed, the character given of him by the Apostle himself, places him in the most amiable light: he denominates him "his brother and companion in labour, and fellow-soldier, the messenger of the Philippian church, and he that ministered to his wants."

It pleased God, however, to have mercy upon him, and with him, upon the Apostle also, lest, as the latter remarks, "he should have sorrow upon sorrow." And such was the affection of St. Paul for the members of the church at Philippi, that no sooner had Epaphroditus recovered, than, although he still remained a captive at Rome, and in uncertainty as to his fate; yet, without consulting his own pleasure or gratification, which must been materially served by the presence of Epaphroditus, he hastened to send him back to his friends. And not only so, but embracing every opportunity

of spreading the savour of Christian doctrine, and, among others, that afforded by multiplying his presence and his preaching by his pen, he made him the bearer of that beautiful epistle, by the preservation of which in the church, he has continued, and to the end of time will continue, to live and to preach.

In this letter, which is supposed to have been written in the year 62, the communion of feeling that subsisted between the Apostle and his friends at Philippi, is pleasingly exhibited. They had endeavoured to acknowledge their obligations to him by every means in their power; and on his part, he declares that every remembrance of them occasions him to express thankfulness to God, as well for their steadfast fellowship in the gospel, as for the interesting evidence they gave of it, by their repeated expressions of attachment to his own person. (Phil. i. 3—5.) They had, on the present occasion, sent him presents by the hands of one of their beloved friends and pastors; and, although it was their design that this individual should abide near

the Apostle's person, to afford him aid and consolation, yet, when he found that they had been alarmed by the intelligence of his sickness, he immediately sends him back; and not only so, but following their own example, he promises as soon as possible to send, on a friendly embassy to them, Timothy, his dearest friend and son in the gospel, until, by the will of God, he might be able to go thither himself. Indeed, the entire epistle is filled with tender expressions towards their persons, of commendation of their conduct in general, and of deep anxiety for their continued prosperity as a church. The divine blessing is with the warmest enthusiasm assured to them, even "that God should supply all their need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus" (ch. iv. 19), and, whilst some are mentioned by name, every saint in Christ among them is directed to consider himself as personally saluted; and that, not only by himself, but by all the brethren at Rome also, to whom, doubtless, he had frequently spoken in commendation of their zealous devotion both to

himself, and to the cause which it was his delightful business to promote. Possessed of this invaluable treasure, and carrying with him the benediction of his apostolic friend and father in the gospel, Epaphroditus returned to Philippi. The manner in which he would be received; the anxious attention that would be given to his account of what he had witnessed relating to their venerable friend, as well as to the detail of circumstances connected with the progress of religion at Rome; and the interest with which the inspired epistle of the holy Apostle would be received and listened to, can be but faintly conceived.

From this period few and slight are necessarily the notices that are to be gathered from the writings of the ancient Christian authors, relative to the future history of this church. The sources from whence the only information is to be derived, so far at least as the writer is at present aware, are, however, such as are in themselves highly interesting; and such as testify, in the most unequivocal manner, the continuance of that

zeal and purity of doctrine for which its members had hitherto been so remarkable. It happens that the destroying hand of time has spared an epistle addressed to the Philippian church, by the venerable Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna. And so well is this epistle authenticated, first by Irenæus, who had been personally acquainted with the writer, and who, in his works, thus speaks of it, "There is a most excellent epistle of Polycarp, written to the Philippians, from which they who are concerned for their salvation may learn both the character of his faith, and the doctrine of the truth:" and then in the following terms by Jerome, "He wrote to the Philippians a very useful epistle, which to this day is read in the assembly of Asia;" that Dr. Lardner observes, "It ought, therefore, to be received and respected as his, without hesitation."¹ Polycarp is said to have been, together with Ignatius, a disciple of St. John; and is supposed to have been the very individual thus addressed by that apostle, "Unto the angel of the church in

¹ The entire epistle will be found in the supplementary chapter.

Smyrna, write ; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive ; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich,) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of satan.¹ Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. ii. 8—11.) And indeed with this prediction his experience exactly corresponded ; having, according to archbishop Wake, suffered martyrdom in the year 147. It is recorded of him, that when informed that his life was sought by his persecutors, he departed, according to our Lord's recommendation, to a neighbouring village, and that there, secluded from observation, he entirely devoted his time, both

¹ "The whole multitude instantly gathering together wood and faggots, out of the shops and baths : the Jews especially, according to their custom, with all readiness assisting them in it."—*The Circular Epistle of the Church of Smyrna, concerning the martyrdom of Polycarp.*

night and day, to prayer for all the world, especially for the suffering church; and that dreaming three nights before his arrest that the pillow under his head was on fire, he mildly observed to those who were with him, "I must be burned alive." The place in which he suffered was a large amphitheatre in Smyrna, the ruins of which are said by the travellers Tavernier and Wheeler to be still remaining, and shewn as the place of Polycarp's martyrdom.

The occasion of his addressing an epistle to the church at Philippi is obvious from a perusal of the letter itself. His friend and fellow-labourer in the vineyard of the gospel, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, had been ordered by imperial mandate, in the year 116, to be conducted a prisoner to Rome, and, on his way to take shipping, had passed through the city of Philippi. To the early Christians, a confessor in bonds was at all times an object of the deepest sympathy; and however humble the individual, yet would he have been hailed as a peculiar favourite of the church and of heaven: what, however,

would be the interest excited by the intelligence that this holy and venerable servant of Jesus Christ was approaching their walls under an escort of soldiers, on his way to Rome, where the Apostle Paul had been so long a prisoner, and where he had surrendered his life in defence of the gospel! Indeed, we are not left to conjecture concerning their conduct upon that occasion. The very first sentence of Polycarp's epistle, after the customary apostolical salutation, consists of a grateful commendation of the zealous interest which they had manifested, as well in the instance of his beloved friend Ignatius, as in that of the two other suffering saints that accompanied him. "I rejoiced greatly with you in our Lord Jesus Christ," he observes, "that ye welcomed the imitators of Christ's love, and accompanied, as it behoved you, those who were in bonds." To understand precisely, however, the object that Polycarp had in view in writing to the church at Philippi, it must be remarked, that the acts and sayings of the martyrs, from the moment of their imprisonment until

their death, were scrupulously registered, in order to be read by the devout, and to be proposed as models for future ages.¹ It appears therefore that the members of the Philippian church, having just witnessed the holy deparment of Ignatius, had become anxious to possess a copy of those epistles that he had been known to have addressed to various churches and individuals, and for that purpose they had applied to Polycarp. "The epistles of Ignatius," he says, "which he wrote unto us, together with what others of his have come to our hands, we have sent according to your desire; by which ye may be greatly profited; for they treat of faith, and patience, and of all things that pertain to edification in the Lord Jesus." And in the words immediately following, Polycarp requests that in return they would send him, for the use of the church over which he presided, an accredited account of

¹ "Few of these ancient acts are come down to our times; the greatest part of them having been destroyed during the dreadful persecution which Diocletian carried on ten years with such fury against the Christians."—*Mosheim*.

such acts and sayings of Ignatius that during his brief interview with them they had observed as worthy of preservation: "What you know certainly of Ignatius, and those that are with him, signify unto us."

The epistle, in general, presents many interesting and touching allusions; and as it was written at a space of fifty years from the period at which the information, in the New Testament, concerning the church at Philippi, ceases, those allusions cannot but be referred to with feelings both of curiosity and pleasure. In the instance just brought before the reader, the wonted love and zeal of the members of the Philippian church is beautifully conspicuous: a holy man of God who, appointed to the ministry by St. John, had spent his life in zealously proclaiming the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ, is apprehended, and, on his way to execution, is conducted in chains through their city: they go forth to meet him, and, as far as permitted, they endeavour to assuage his pain, and to afford comfort and ease to him in his fatigue; they listen to his discourse,

and with reverence commit to memory his godly sayings; they offer on his behalf the sympathy of their tears and their prayers; and they seek to learn from his bright example both how to suffer and how to die. In the *second place*, it is ascertained from this epistle that the state of the church at Philippi was similar to that of most others at that period, with respect to its exposure to persecution, and that the spectacle of a Christian in bonds for the sake of the gospel, as exhibited in the person of Ignatius, was by no means of rare occurrence; that among themselves also they had had instances of severe trial, several of their own community having suffered martyrdom; and that the fire of persecution being still kindled every where around them, it remained probable that in the course of events the lives of many of them would be threatened by its devouring element. "Wherefore," says Polycarp, "I exhort all of you that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise all patience, a pattern of which ye have seen set forth before your eyes, not only in the

blessed Ignatius, and Zozimus, and Rufus ; but in others among yourselves ; and in Paul himself, and the rest of the Apostles. For they loved not this present world ; but Him who died, and was raised again by God for us." In the *third place*, the gratifying fact is expressly declared of their having, in the midst of all the trials to which they had been subjected, maintained inviolate the faith and doctrines of the gospel ; and that "the things they had learned, and received, and heard, and seen in the Apostle Paul," (Philip. iv. 9,) they had so zealously practised, that the happy effects thereof had continued still to signalize their character. "I rejoiced greatly with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, that the root of the faith which was formerly preached unto you, remains firm in you to this day, and brings forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ." And *lastly*, the pleasing inference is afforded, by the appeal that is in no less than three instances made to their recollections of an individual to whom the Philippian church owed the first introduction of the gospel among them,

of the grateful veneration in which they continued to hold the memory of the Apostle Paul. The first of these references has just been quoted; another forms part of the third section, and the other occurs in the eleventh section of the epistle.

For nearly three centuries from this time, and how much longer it is perhaps impossible to discover, the church at Philippi is known to have continued, not only in existence, but in a state of comparative prosperity. About the year 209, Tertullian¹ is found observing, that if the enemies of Christianity wish to inquire into the nature and tendency of the doctrines taught among the Christians, they should repair, among other places that he names, to Philippi. A hundred years after this, Eusebius² makes a similar honourable mention of it. And in the fourth century, two of the most celebrated Christian writers of the period, Ambrose and Chrysostom, each in their observations on the epistle of Paul to the Philippians, remarks that the church still

¹ De Præscrip. Hæret.

² Ecclesiastical History.

remained a pattern of holiness and consistency in the faith. And, when the former history of this church is considered; when it is considered how scrupulously its successive members had conducted themselves, according to the direction of the Apostle Paul, as recorded in the epistle addressed to them, and which epistle they had religiously preserved, not only in the archives of their places of worship, but in the more sacred repositories of memory; when it is considered how eminently and constantly they appear to have practised "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report;" (Philip. iv. 8;) it may be presumed that the truth, as it is in Jesus, continued to be maintained by them in all its purity, until the utter extinction of their lives by the combined agency of persecution and political fury; or, having by the light of their doctrines irradiated for awhile the Eastern hemisphere, they may be supposed to have emigrated

towards the valleys and mountains of the West, in search of a more sequestered residence.¹ The various revolutions that succeeded the decline of the Roman dominion, were in the highest degree fatal to the interests of religion. Peace, under almost any circumstances, is more congenial with the mild attributes of Christianity than are the notes, and the alarms, and the ferocities of war. Barbarity and cruelty will ever be found to be as incompatible with the existence of true religion, as are luxury and effeminacy. It is no subject of surprise, therefore, that, after the devastating incursions of the ruthless barbarians, that successively invaded the provinces as well of Greece

¹ "Let the Bishop of Meaux, (Bossuet,) if he please, think the Protestants might be ashamed to go and look for their ancestors among the Waldenses, and to hunt for them in the caverns of the Alps. His declamations shall never be able to make us forego a jot of that tender veneration and respect we have most justly conceived for this nursery and seed-plot of martyrs, and for those triumphant troops who have so generously lavished away their blood in the defence of truth, against all the efforts, all the machinations, and all the violence of the Romish party." —*Dr. Allix's Remarks on the Ancient Church of Piedmont*, 4to. p. 293.

as of Rome, the letters of Basil and Gregory should be observed to contain charges and warnings to the Christians to whom they were addressed, against the fearful dangers to which they were exposed ; or that, when town after town had been taken by storm, and their inhabitants had been put to the sword, Augustin, in his writings, should be found lamenting that the churches had become forsaken of their ministers, that the sacred services of religion had become abandoned, and that the very edifices of Christian worship had been levelled to the ground.¹

¹ De Civitate Dei.

CHAPTER IV.

JESUS CHRIST THE PECULIAR OBJECT OF THE FIRST BELIEVERS' FAITH AND LOVE.

“Wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.—Phil. ii. 10, 11.

“Let fire and the cross; let herds of wild beasts; let the breaking of bones; let the tearing in pieces of the whole body; yea, let all the torments of the devil come upon me; only let me possess Jesus Christ.”—*Ignatius*.

It cannot possibly have escaped the observation of the reader, that the doctrine of Christianity, as introduced by the Apostle Paul into Philippi, was eminently imbued with the utmost reverence for the person of Jesus Christ. This eminent Apostle had not been personally acquainted with our Lord during his abode upon earth, yet a miracle had been wrought, by which he had been

called by the glorified Christ himself into his service. And certainly, the preaching and writings of none of the Apostles were more characterized by a desire to exalt the person and mediatorial work of the Redeemer, or were more successful in recommending his doctrines, than were his. It will also have been remarked, that in Philippi the heart of Lydia had been opened by the discourse of the Apostle upon the subject of the character and office of Christ; that the jailer had been converted by having been directed to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ; and that the families of both of those individuals, with the rest of the converts in that place, had, in like manner, been won by his discourses on the same all-interesting subject. And in the delightful epistle which the Apostle addressed to the same church, he styles himself the servant of Jesus Christ; whilst the favoured individuals to whom it is addressed, are denominated the saints of Christ Jesus: the benediction of grace, mercy, and peace, employed both at the commencement and at the close of the

epistle, are desired as coming from the Lord Jesus Christ; his prison chains are termed bonds in Christ; for him to live is Christ; and to depart is to be with Christ; he declares that he counts all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ; and they are desired to let their conversation be such as becometh the gospel of Christ; to have the mind that was in Christ; to rejoice in Christ Jesus, having their conversation in heaven, from whence both himself and they are said to look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

That the nature and necessity of faith in Christ should ever have become a subject of controversy in the church, after all the statements of the Apostle in this as well as in his other inspired epistles, is certainly a matter of surprise. True it is, however, that the question, "In what consists faith in Christ?" is one which since the apostolic era has been made to admit of a marvellous diversity of replies. Books innumerable and of every variety of size have been issued, and are still inflicted upon the world, in

explanation and defence of as many definitions of the subject, whilst the arrow has been pointed, and the glittering steel has been unsheathed, to enforce some of its peculiar modifications. This incongruity of opinion among the professors of Christianity upon a subject of so much importance,—an incongruity which has for centuries past proved a stumbling-block to the world,—evidently arises from the anxiety that prevails among each of the sects into which the church is divided, to render the gospel subservient to their several conceptions and prejudices, instead of sacrificing those prejudices at the shrine of divine truth.

But it is evident that the subject of faith in Christ presented no difficulty to the minds of the members of the Philippian church: its simple statement by the Apostles and Christian ministers sufficed without any elaborate definition. Nor when the jailer, awakened to a conviction of the divinity of the Apostles' doctrines, inquired, in the character of a contrite sinner, what he should do to be saved, did Paul and Silas seek to

prepare his mind for the reception of the truth, by entering into a lengthened disquisition on the principles and mode of believing. No single case occurs in the New Testament records, in which faith is thus propounded.

The truth is, that the faculty of believing is a faculty common to humanity; it is a principle already in the sinner's possession, and it is to this latent principle, that the facts of the gospel make their affecting appeal. Not that this appeal is to be met by a merely cold, uninfluential assent to the general statements of revelation;¹ for the evidence in proof of the facts upon which Christianity is founded, is such, that the most malignant enemies of the early Christians did not dare to controvert them; as may be inferred from the writings still extant of a Celsus, a Porphyry, and a Hierocles. The importance of a simple conviction of the truth is this, that it places

¹ This degree of faith is commonly denominated *historical faith*, but this is evidently an erroneous appellation, inasmuch as it frequently includes an assent, as well to the *doctrines* as to the *facts* of the gospel.

the individual in the only position in which it is possible, under the gospel economy, for the grace of salvation to reach him. The truth must be known to be believed, and it must not only be known to be believed, but it must be cordially entertained, if ever its principles are expected to exert an abiding influence over the conduct. The young man with great possessions, that applied to Jesus Christ, to learn more particularly from himself, the nature of his doctrines, appears to have fully admitted the obligations of Scripture morality; and yet, according to our Saviour's own statement, he was still only near to the kingdom of heaven: his faith possessed one insuperable defect. Whilst, therefore, it is the undoubted prerogative of the reasoning powers of the mind, to apprehend and assent to the validity of the evidence for the truth, it is absolutely necessary, if the benefits to be derived from a knowledge of any given truth are of a nature to be desired, that the affections of the heart, in their operation, correspond with those of the mind, in order to actual

endeavours being made for the attainment of the object involved in the truth propounded. And thus, in New Testament language, it is said, that "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." That faith then, in the facts and doctrines of the gospel may become available to salvation, divine grace, in other words, and according to our Lord's own declaration to Nicodemus, the Holy Ghost, must by his mysterious operation incline and influence the will, so that every affection of the heart being made to harmonize with the truth received by the mind, Christ may be welcomed as the Redeemer of the believing soul from all the misery incident to a condition of alienation from God, and that he may be trusted in as such, with an appropriating affiance, both in his grace and his power. And although the former degree of faith, or that which merely admits the truth of the gospel, be necessarily insufficient to the completion of its saving character; yet still it is the neglect of attaining that degree, or when attained, the neglect of cherishing the salu-

tary convictions that the truth is calculated to inspire, by the use of constant and importunate prayer for the grace of the Holy Spirit to influence and convert the will from a love of error and sin, to a love of truth and holiness, that constitutes the guilt of an unbeliever, and that causes to be levelled at his person, so many of the fearful denunciations of God's holy word.

This simple definition of the subject, it will be remarked, divests it at once of all its apparent difficulty; inasmuch as that whilst it throws the responsibility of receiving or rejecting the truth upon man, it secures the attribution of the boon of salvation to the free grace of God.

And here, it must be observed, that with respect to Jesus Christ, there are two circumstances offered by the Holy Scriptures to the faith, and necessary to the credence of the Christian believer. The first is, the absolute divinity of Christ; and the second is, the absolute humanity of Christ. Concerning the existence of God at all, however, how little has ever been known, inde-

pendently of his own revelation, as set forth in the books of the Old and New Testaments. The heathen philosophers, for instance, knew comparatively nothing of this subject; and certainly nothing that tended to exert any very great moral influence upon the world. What, it may be justly inquired, has all that the ancient philosophers, and even those with the book of revelation before them, but who, affecting to think independently of it, have advanced upon this profound subject, amounted to, but doubt and speculation? True, they have made some advances in their endeavours to penetrate the arcana of nature; they have succeeded in embodying their discoveries in that province into something like rational and scientific system; but is it not equally true, that every step thus taken has gone further to prove the might of the First Great Cause, and to render Deity still more illustrious and incomprehensible? It has: and the fact has thereby been made still more evident, that none but Deity can explain the nature and properties of the divine existence.

But the question is, Has a divine revelation been vouchsafed, so far as is compatible with the present condition of man? The Christian replies in the affirmative. He says, he finds the book called the Bible, and which claims to have been written under the influence of divine inspiration, to possess every mark of its high origin; and learning therein that man by wisdom knows not God, he has forsaken the parade of philosophical disquisition, and pursuing the study of that book with an acknowledgment of native weakness and ignorance, he declares that he not only discovers that it contains an appropriate and consistent elucidation of the mystery of the being of God, but that, in the prosecution of his sacred contemplation, the gate of spiritual intercourse with his Maker is thereby thrown open, and that he is favoured with fellowship with the Father, and with the Son, and with the Holy Ghost.

Yes, from the testimony of divine revelation alone, it is discovered that the uncreated, unbeginning, unending Fountain of light and of life, is three in name, one

in being; holding together a mystery of communion, unfathomable to all but the Eternal Divinity. And because this discovery runs counter to the various theories which have been otherwise formed upon the subject, shall it be rejected? or, because our finite minds are incompetent fully to comprehend the nature and properties of the Deity, shall we deny this mystery, forming, as it does, one of its chiefest glories? Who but will be ready to admit, that such a communion in the Godhead may exist; since the most powerful and lofty of human intellects can know comparatively less of the Infinite, than they can of the exploreless centre of the vast earth upon which we tread, or the still less explorable regions of planetary evolution? If, then, there may (for aught the reason of man in his present cloud-girt position can tell) exist a communion in the Deity; and if this communion be clearly and specifically indicated in the volume of revelation, the fact may be considered, so far as the exclusive source for present information on the subject is con-

cerned, established on grounds which must ever be considered amply secure by those who acknowledge the propriety and necessity of submitting, especially in whatever relates to the deep things of God, to the guidance of the inspired Scriptures. Upon this authority it is that the writer, and it is to be hoped the reader too, acknowledges himself compelled to admit his most unlimited belief in the fact, that as an essentially Divine Person, the existence of Christ runs eternally parallel with that of the Father, and of the Holy Ghost, and that he has for ever and ever maintained with the Godhead a communion of untold interest, and of unsearchable import,—a communion which he has himself emphatically described, as “the glory that he had before the world was.”

The doctrine of Christ's divinity, indeed, is a doctrine as anciently received in the church as were the earliest portions of the Scripture records. It is a doctrine sometimes directly stated in Old Testament revelation; and when it is so, always in terms suited to the dignity of the subject :

it is a doctrine that essentially runs through, and is necessarily interwoven with, the whole economy of human salvation, from the period of the first promise that was made concerning it, until the figures, and the types, and the declarations, and the promises of Old Testament revelation received their predicted accomplishment in the person of the Messiah; and it is a doctrine which, as a holy halo, encircling the evangelical and apostolical writings, imparts to the gospel-covenant all its spirituality and all its heavenliness.

And then, with respect to the humanity of Christ; so securely surrounded is this fact by every possible circumstance necessary to afford conviction, that it has scarcely ever been entirely controverted. The thousands, and tens of thousands, who, from his birth at Bethlehem, until the ultimate proof that was given of it by his ignominious death without the gates of Jerusalem, witnessed his exposure to all the infirmities and casualties incident to human life, were perfectly sensible that he was a man tried in all points

like unto themselves. There was nothing about his aspect on earth that an unregenerate mind should particularly desire : no outward and visible signs of his native dignity and splendour appeared in his person : and so effectually was the divinity enshrouded in a moving piece of darkness, that except with reference to those whose eyes had been unscaled by the touch of the heavenly Physician, it even then required as great an effort of the mind to apprehend him as possessing the glory of the only begotten of the Father, as it does at present.

And whilst his life and his death afforded irrefragable proofs of his absolute humanity, so were both his divinity and humanity simultaneously evinced; not only in the instances of his exhibition of supernatural powers, but immediately and directly by the scene witnessed by the three disciples on the mount, when they perceived his person changed into more than noon-day brightness; by the power that he proved to possess over the world-subduing principle of death ;

by the exhibition of his glorified body to his disciples prior to his ascension to his heavenly abode, as also, subsequently to that event, to the illustrious apostle Paul.¹

Now the faith of the Philippians, and the other early Christians who, like them, had never had the opportunity of seeing Christ in the flesh, consisted in their yielding uncompromising credence to the facts concerning Christ, announced to them either as preached by an inspired Apostle, or as made known to them in the Scriptures of the gospel. By the exercise of the powerful principle of faith, they transported themselves, as it were, to the very scenes of the Saviour's earthly pilgrimage; they became witnesses of all his doings and sufferings on behalf of the redeemed; they wept in grateful sympathy over the dreadful circumstances of his death; they mingled with his sorrowing disciples as they slowly bare him to the tomb; they were lost in wonder and rap-

¹ Made and not made; God incarnate; True Life in death; both of Mary and of God; such is Jesus Christ.—*Ignatius's Epistle to the Ephesians.*

ture: at his triumphant victory over death and the grave; they attuned their voices to unite with the celestial choir in welcoming their King to his everlasting throne; and although he now tenanted the highest heavens, yet, borne on the wings of faith and of love, thither would they ascend, directed by the chart pourtrayed by the pens of the sacred historians;—there, in pleasing admiration, would they dwell upon all the features which compose his lovely character, and on his gracious attitude towards that race whose desperate cause he had deigned to espouse; there would they glance at the concourse of celestial worshippers, the murmurs of whose converse, and the notes of whose anthems, centred in the celebration of the honour and the praise of that overwhelming object which absorbed their entranced apprehensions; there would they fall prostrate in adoring silence; and, in holy abstraction from all besides, fix their concentrated attention on that Being, who, whilst he stood confessed by the myriads of his intelligent subjects the mighty God, blended therewith the more

subdued and approachable character of Redeemer and Saviour of men; there, too, would they discover that the interest of Christ in the welfare of his people remained unabated, notwithstanding the majesty of his person, the splendour of his court, and the glory of his reign; and there would they learn that the church of the Redeemed on earth still maintained a place in his remembrance, that all the decrees of his government involved the everlasting well-being of his elect, that the promises made to his members below are confirmed above; and that as grace and truth met together in Him on earth, so they remain his companions in heaven, and the chiefest ornaments which surround his great white throne.

Faith like this could not fail to be strictly influential, to produce all the holy and heavenly signs of blissful renovation; and, whilst it was manifestly an acknowledgment of the believer's native wretchedness and spiritual destitution, independent of the grace and mercy to be alone obtained by the way of the cross, it afforded a proof of their

grateful acceptance of God's mercy in the way of God's appointment, of their determination to forsake the paths of sin, and to attach themselves to the service of Him who died for them, and who arose again; and it formed the bond, on their part, of that mysterious union which was ratified by the Lord of life, by their deliverance from all the evils of the fall, their exaltation to the dignity of adoption into the family of God, and their accession to a title to thrones and principalities in his boundless empire.

The early Christians had been involved in the darkness of idolatry and of sin, but "the light of truth had shined on their minds, discovering to them the glory of the invisible God in the face of Jesus Christ, and they beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten Son of God, full of grace and of truth." Formerly "they were in darkness, but now they were light in the Lord, and henceforth they walked as children of the light,"—they had been guilty of all the sinful enormities of paganism, but in consonance with the gospel promise, "he that

believeth shall be saved," "they were washed, they were sanctified, they were justified, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God;" and thus it was that, to many of them, was as justly addressed, as it is beautifully expressed, the congratulation of the Apostle Peter, "whom, not having seen, ye love, in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

How could individuals thus situated but be penetrated with the deepest sentiments of grateful love towards the person to whom they stood indebted for their emancipation from so much evil, and to whom they owed all the blessings and all the privileges which they now delightfully enjoyed? How would they be jealous of themselves with a godly jealousy, lest their affections should ever be found varying a single point from the object of their regards! All they did, and said, and feared, and hoped for, would be influenced by their love to Jesus. In every thing they would have exclusive reference to Him. In Him, it might be justly said, "they lived,

and moved, and had their being." And when in holy transport an Apostle would exclaim, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him might not perish, but have everlasting life,"—"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God,"—"He loved us, and gave himself for us," the believing saint would respond with no less ecstasy, "Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father, to Him be glory, and power, and dominion, for ever and ever." "Blessing, and honour, and power, be unto Him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb, for ever and ever. Amen."

Love, indeed, is eminently an active principle; it seeks with restless anxiety the fulfilment of the pleasure, expressed or implied, of the party on whom it reposes. And in no case is this fact more fully exemplified, than in that of the attachment of the Christian believer to his crucified Redeemer,

Thus it was, that obedience to the will of that endeared Character, formed the joyful and unceasing employment of the early saints. Following the example of their Lord himself, who had declared by word and deed that his meat and drink consisted in doing the will of his Father, so no aliment was so acceptable to them as constant obedience to their Saviour's behests. They loved him for his own sake ; for the beauty, and excellence, and grace which adorned his character ; and they loved him also for the sake of all that he had achieved in their behalf : and thus it was that a double revenue of devoted love arose to the Messiah from their position as Christian believers. It was love to the exalted character of the thrice holy and adorable Jesus which formed the main-spring of all their conduct ; it was love to Him that influenced them in the choice of their friends, employments, and amusements ; it was the same influential principle that enabled them to suffer reproaches and imprisonment, and that prompted them to exclaim, in the midst of the most appalling

persecutions, “None of these things move us; neither life, nor death, nor any other thing shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; yea, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through Him that loved us, and gave himself for us.”

That the faith and love exercised towards the Saviour by true Christians at the present more remote period, is less vivid and influential than it was in the primitive era of the church, is a circumstance often asserted. But does not Jesus Christ remain towards his people the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever? And if such be the case, his mercy and grace flow towards his followers now, in no less copious streams than they did in ancient times. Are not the promises which he has made still the inheritance of the believer; and does not the direction for his conduct in reference to those promises, still continue as applicable as ever?—“Whatsoever ye ask in my name, believing, ye shall receive.”

The Christian, therefore, who, without wavering, is bold to rely on the word of his

Saviour, will in this, as in former periods, obtain all that he needs to render him in every respect as holy and heavenly-minded as were the early Christians. The circumstances of the latter, it is true, were such as to render more conspicuous the graces with which they were adorned. Their adherence to the precepts and spirit of the gospel, exposed as they were to trials to which no parallel is now presented, whilst it required the aid of peculiar grace, shed on their character a lustre unattainable in the present aspect of the Christian church. But the essential attributes of Christian character, which are still distinctly delineated in the holy lives and triumphant deaths of thousands of the humble believers in Christ, are demonstrative proofs that the power and grace of Christ are displayed towards the elect, without respect to time or seasons, to people or to climes. Nor is it for a moment to be doubted, but wherever the sacred records of the Redeemer's love to sinners are perused in the spirit of prayerful self-renunciation, and in the exercise of willing and

increasing faith, that the result will accord with all that has been stated in the foregoing pages, respecting the devoted love of the early Christians to their heavenly Saviour.

CHAPTER V.

THE NOVEL ATTITUDE OF A CHRISTIAN BELIEVER, WITH RESPECT TO GOD AND HIS ETERNAL DESTINY.

“ Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the praise and glory of God.”—Phil. i. 11.

“ Therefore, my brethren, dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.”—Phil. iv. 1.

AMONG the many remarkable truths that in the gospel of Jesus Christ are exhibited in a boldness of relief which at once bespeaks their importance, is that which indicates the novel position in which the Christian believer is represented as standing, with reference to all that is most interesting to him as an intelligent immortal. It was the lively apprehension of that position which mainly constituted the glory of primitive Christianity, and which conduced to that estimation of holy character for which the early Christians

were so remarkable. In order, however, to the formation of an appropriate conception of that position, it is necessary to revert to what was the condition of the believer, prior to the period of his being invested with the insignia and the privileges incident to the rank which he now occupies in the status of the celestial constitution. And in making this descent, for a moment, from the high station occupied by the believer, into the dismal province from which he has escaped, some idea may be formed of the depth of that compassion which contrived and which executed his salvation. Alas! that in depicting that condition, the present state of so many thousands of even professed Christians of the present day should be pourtrayed.

It must be an admitted fact, that the infinitely and necessarily pure and holy God could create no individual being, or any single class of beings, but what in their various properties should bear testimony to the perfections of their divine Originator. Thus, the hierarchy of celestial spirits, as being formed to occupy a sphere nearest

the eternal throne, are represented in the Holy Scriptures as possessing a nature in an eminent degree endowed with the moral capacities of their great Creator. And thus the intelligent class of beings that were formed to occupy, as it were, the glorious horizon between the regions of heaven and the fair creation spread at their feet, are in like manner represented as having received a form suited continually to receive communications of light and blessedness from that Being in whose image they were created, and to reflect that light and blessedness to the scene and objects around them. If, therefore, any one or more of the intelligent beings that have been brought into existence by the creating energy of God, are found to exhibit qualities the reverse of those that, in their moral characteristics, differ from those possessed and manifested in all the ways and works of their Creator, it may, and it must be known and acknowledged, that those qualities are derived from a source which have their origin in a spirit hostile to his nature and to his authority. But that legion^s

of the angelic hosts, who once basked in the sunshine of celestial blessedness, who once rejoiced in the light of their Creator's presence, who once sped their flight sublime through the golden regions of everlasting spring, now possess and exhibit qualities the reverse of those in which they were at first created, is a fact both revealed in the volume of divine inspiration, and but too well ascertained by their interference with the affairs of men. Nor is it less certain, besides those fallen spirits whom

“——— the Almighty power

Hurl'd headlong, flaming, from the ethereal sky,
To bottomless perdition,”

that the whole race of mankind are involved in like malignity of character. Indeed, so palpable is the fact of the defection of the human soul from that state of moral perfection in which it was formed, that it is matter of surprise that it should ever have been the subject of question or equivocation; for, not only is it evident from the absence, in the unrenewed mind, of every correct apprehension of God, and consequently of

every enlightened and influential motive for conduct, but a fact it is, without the recognition of which, the entire series of Scripture revelation is shorn of all its appropriateness, and of all its importance. The rites and ceremonies of the Levitical institutions—the burden of prophetic ministry—the intent of New Testament record—the very necessity for a divine revelation,—are they not all founded upon the mournful consideration of man's apostacy from his Maker ?

Let God then be justified, although all men be sinners. Holiness is necessarily the element of all the intelligences that he hath created ; and, consequently, so soon as the soul recedes from the appropriate position and atmosphere of its nature, so soon must it become involved in wretchedness and darkness ; and so soon as it infringes the eternal order of infinite wisdom and goodness, so soon must the inevitable consequence of that derangement be expressed in the manifested disapprobation of God. And with this agrees the actual experience of the sinner. Let, for instance, his real

condition be considered. The heathen philosophers themselves acknowledged that the mind, like the sun, while it revealed the objects of earth, obscured those of heaven. And how true is it, that with respect to all that relates to the realities connected with a higher state than the present, the sinner is lost to all suitable and salutary perception ! No longer are his sources of enjoyment derived from heaven ; no longer does he seek his happiness in converse with his God, and with the blessed spirits that live in the light of his countenance ; no longer does his felicity consist, as it does with those sinless beings, in the unclouded vision of the glorious perfections that compose the ineffable Godhead, in the devout recognition of the infinite supremacy of the divine rule, or in the appropriate estimation of the order, and the beauty, and the splendour of every fiat of the celestial empire. No friend has the sinner in God ; no home in heaven ; no sympathy with its happy inmates. Whatever be his outward circumstances ; however intelligent his mind ; however amiable his

temper; however numerous and affectionate his earthly friends, the halo of God's approving presence is wanting; the sun of the soul is darkened; no enjoyment suited to his spiritual nature is realized; seeking light and comfort from the flickering rays of created good, he only proceeds further and further into the density of midnight, whilst anon the lightning of divine justice, flashing across his path, but discovers to him the wretchedness of his situation, and affords to him an indication of the impending storm of God's indignation:

"Such is the mind that sin hath riven,
Unfit for earth, undoom'd for heaven;
Darkness above, despair beneath,
Around it flame, within it death."

But deplorable as is the condition of man by nature, and severe in his character as a holy and inexorable dispenser of justice as the aspect of God may appear towards the sinner, it should not, because some presume upon the fact, be concealed that "His mercies are still over all his works," and that He hath declared himself to be "merciful and

gracious, slow to anger, and of great compassion." To the glory too of the Divine character, it ought to be kept in mind, that ever since the period that man first strayed from the path of innocence and peace—ever since he first entered upon the devious tracts of sin, and became exposed to the tempests indigenous to the bleak regions into which he has wandered—ever since he first threw off his allegiance to his rightful Sovereign, and took up the position of hostility to holiness and to God, he has been followed with indications of the compassionate disposition of his offended Maker towards him; and, instead of having been overwhelmed by the armies of Jehovah's insulted throne, the olive branch of peace has been extended to him, and his heart has been besieged by the benignant heralds of a God of infinite grace—heralds bearing terms of reconciliation—terms which, whilst they secure to the offender that embraces them, a forgiveness of unimaginable comprehensiveness, an endless oblivion of the wrong which his wicked and ungenerous conduct has

done to the empire of Heaven, obtain his succession to an inheritance of blessedness, which in one sense appears more suited to the sinless intelligences of the celestial kingdom, than to the reclaimed apostates of the human race.

Here, then, it may be remarked, that the Christian believer is he who, as some have it, controlled by the sovereign impulse of God determining his will; or who, according to others, influenced by "the grace given to every man to profit withal," enters into the design of the terms of the gospel, and accepts of the proffered reconciliation. Believing the statements of revelation in its annunciation of the danger, present and remote, incident to the unnatural situation in which an unreconciled sinner stands to his Maker; and overwhelmed with grateful love by the consideration that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoso believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life;" that "Jesus Christ came into the world not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might

be saved," he yields without the desire of compromise to the requirements of that gospel which conveys to his happy soul such a tide of consolatory anticipations—requirements, be it remarked, which do not demand the performance of any particular service, the submission to any description of penance, or the exposure to either a brief or a lengthened quarantine, prior to the sinner's reception into the presence and favour of his offended Sovereign ; but which merely demand his faith in the fact, that God so loved *him* as to give his Son to make for *his* sake that satisfaction to the demands of Divine justice, without the fulfilment of which no proposition of reconciliation could have been available ; his faith in Jesus Christ, as having effected a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation and satisfaction for all his transgressions ; and his faith in the willingness and readiness of God now to pardon all his transgressions.

From this moment—the moment of the believer's recognition of the sovereignty of God, and of his submission to the benign em-

pire of grace, his character and destinies become entirely and for ever reversed ; and he who, destitute of holiness and under the dominion of sin and unbelief, was heir to all that is cheerless and desolating, is now filled with joy through believing, and is made to abound with hope through the power of the Holy Ghost. Invested with a new character, how interesting and blissful are his prospects ! he is now a loyal subject, yea, more, a devoted friend of that God, who crowns his adherents with loving-kindness, and with tender mercies ; of that God, who, possessing endless capabilities of bestowing good, has ordained that the felicitous existence of his believing people shall run parallel with his own eternal being, and that their inheritance shall once more consist in the participation of his own ineffable nature, and of the joys that make glad the city of his habitation. A change this in the position of those who are the happy subjects of it, which it may be presumed would necessarily form a topic of frequent description and congratulation in the epistles of the apostolic ministers to

the primitive churches, composed of individuals thus singularly situated. Accordingly, no subject, except those of the glorious cause and the affecting means by which this crisis in the believer's history was achieved, is so frequently and so eloquently pourtrayed in their inspired letters ; nor is any subject, after the love of God and the death of Christ, so often and so successfully urged upon Christian believers, as a motive for gratitude and consistency of conduct. In those epistles it is, that in language glowing with the ardour of feeling which the delightful theme is calculated to inspire, the Apostles call to the remembrance of the early converts their former lamentable condition, with a view, by comparison with their present attitude, to picture to them the length and breadth of the privileges with which they are now invested. There it is that the believer, who is stated to have been an enemy, is represented as reconciled to his God. " You," writes St. Paul, " who were sometime alienated and enemies in your minds by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled. And you, being

dead in your sins, hath he quickened together with Christ, having forgiven you all trespasses, blotting out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against you, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross ;” so that in vain may unbelief suggest, and the tempter assert, the incompleteness of gospel forgiveness : the hand-writing of condemnation is nailed to the cross, and there it remains suspended; henceforth the charter by which the reconciliation of the feeblest believer is for ever attested. There, they who had been worshippers of idols and workers of iniquity, are represented as being now the temples of the Holy Ghost, and as redeemed from all iniquity, and made to serve in righteousness the only living and true God. “When ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which are not gods.” “But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he hath loved us, hath given unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” There, they who had

been enveloped in the night of sin, are depicted as being now introduced into regions of celestial illumination: "Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: who hath delivered you from the power of darkness, and hath translated you into the kingdom of his dear Son: in whom ye have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of your sins." There, they who had been outcasts from their native home, are affectionately reminded, that they are now established in their Father's favour and in their Father's house. "Wherefore, remember that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise; but now, ye who were sometime afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ; and because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." And there, they who were without hope and without God in the world, are now declared to be filled with all hope and peace in believing.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away; and hath made us kings and priests unto God, to whom be glory and dominion, for ever and ever.”

What an extraordinary revolution! A revolution incredible upon authority less than that of inspiration. With what an importance does this view of the gospel invest it! Well might the contemplation of such a mystery baffle the faculties even of a sainted Apostle: overwhelmed with the glimpse of it with which he was on one occasion favoured, well might he exclaim, in adoring trepidation, “O, the depths both of the wisdom and of the love of God! such knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain unto it.” Indeed, it was this vivid apprehension of the beauty of holiness, and of the blessedness involved in its forming the characteristic, whether of

the glorified spirits above, or of the redeemed individuals on earth, that prompted the impassioned exhortation of the Apostle to the members of the church at Philippi, when, in writing to them, he so affectionately urges them to steadfastness in their Christian profession. Too well had he been aware of their sad condition, when, like the rest of the heathen, they were yet without hope and without God in the world; and readily had he complied with the application made to him by vision, to come over and help them. Having, therefore, announced to them God's method of salvation by the gospel, and his heart having been gladdened by witnessing, in their experience, the sanctifying power of the truth, in regenerating the character, and in advancing the believer to a position of so much blessedness and security, as it is his high privilege to enjoy under the dispensation of the gospel; he could not but be anxious that they should maintain the holy eminence to which the belief of the truth had exalted them. And, as long as their conduct was found to reflect

•

the sanctifying nature and tendency of that truth, as long as they exhibited the evidence of their possession of that holiness of character that formed the bond of their alliance with God and with heaven, the saintly mind and heart of the Apostle could not but view them with the sentiments of sympathy and affection, so feelingly and exultingly expressed in those epithets employed in addressing them in his epistle, "My dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and my crown." Nor could he, as their spiritual friend and guide, fail to exhort them, in the language of affectionate solicitude, "so to stand fast in the Lord," that thereby they might at once secure the continuance of their own happiness, and by their example recommend to others the sanctifying principles by which their conduct was governed.

Let it not, however, be supposed that this aspect of the Christian's character and glorious prospects, belongs exclusively to the believers in the earliest ages of the church. It is true, indeed, that to them the descriptions so beautifully and frequently

drawn by the Apostles in their epistles, had immediate and primeval allusion ; but it is no less true, that the same delineations are altogether as just with regard to the people of God in all ages, and that “such honour have all the saints.” There are still on earth those whom these descriptions pourtray, and to whom these prospects are thrown open ; and it is still the undoubted privilege of that soul whom these honours await, and for whom is reserved this eternal weight of glory, to rejoice in the earnest of that blissful inheritance. Numerous, indeed, are the examples on record, from the apostolic period unto the present, of the power of divine grace in re-impressing the image of God’s holiness upon the soul ; and, consequently, of restoring the individual to the enjoyment of all those sources of comfort and happiness, of which he was necessarily deprived in his condition of alienation from the light and the favour of God. Many there are, who, having by the evidence of divine truth been made conscious of their depravity, and of the danger to which they

were consequently exposed ; who, whilst in the very act of acknowledging the propriety of God's indignation against the sinner, and whilst yet engaged in self-reproach, and in vindication of God's judgments, and in grateful approval of the gospel method of salvation, have witnessed at once the dispersion of the fearful clouds that sin and unbelief had caused to surround them ; and who have experienced the light and glory of heaven descending upon their vision, and have rejoiced to observe every object connected with their highest interests, suddenly become irradiated with a hue of heavenly brightness : and whereas, formerly, a cloud of impenetrable darkness appeared to obscure the holy attributes of God, and the holy revelation of God, that so far from comfort having been apprehended in reviewing the one, or in the perusal of the other, the very attempt was like presuming to approach unto the mount which could not be touched for the threatening tempests with which it was surrounded, yet hath the believing soul at length been made to realize

the blessedness of obtaining, through faith in Jesus, access to the throne of heavenly grace ; and of deriving peace and assurance from the aspect of mercy and love, now discovered to beam forth in the exceeding great and precious promises of the gospel. And to the glory also of divine grace be it recorded, that thousands and tens of thousands have since been the happy instances in which the principle of holiness having re-established its empire during life, its exalting and salutary influence has been exhibited in sustaining the heart of the expiring saint, by the hopes and expectations of that immortality, the blessedness of which consists in eternal communion with a holy God, and in endless fellowship with the holy intelligences that find their only home and heaven in secure seclusion from all that is opposed to the perfections and authority of Him whom they continually adore, exclaiming, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty."

Few and faint, it is acknowledged, are the features here given of the attitude in which

a believer stands with reference to God and his eternal destiny. To have portrayed even these features more minutely, would have required an extension of the subject, altogether incompatible with the limits of the present volume. This sketch, however, may serve as an index to the singular position of the true Christian ; it may tend to induce, in those that read it, an appropriate estimate of the character which it describes ; it may be the means of encouraging the faith of some feeble follower of the Lamb ; or it may allure to the contemplation of the worth and grandeur of a Christian's calling, some halting wanderer around the suburbs of Zion.

CHAPTER VI.

THE COMMUNION OF THE SAINTS.

"Notwithstanding, ye have well done that ye did communicate in my affliction."—Phil. iv. 14.

"Arbor quid vitalis? Amor. Paradisus? Amor. Fons
vitalis? Amor. Vita Perennis? Amor. Quid Deus Ipsius?"
MOR. I.—ANON.

THE genuine spirit of Christianity is eminently a spirit of the most benign philanthropy—a participation of the beneficent temper of its Divine Founder—an infusion to the heart of the believer of a spark of the undying flame of infinite love. Extensive, however, as are the charities of the true Christian, far and wide as they seek to diffuse themselves, they who possess the same sympathies with himself are the object upon whom his affections most complacently

1 What is the tree of life; what is Paradise; what the river Eden; what is eternal life; yea, what is God himself?—LOVE.

repose : and it is in the reciprocal interchange of holy sentiments with those who have participated in like divine emanations with himself, that his present heaven chiefly consists.

True, the duty of missionary enterprise was never more strictly recognised, or more zealously prosecuted, than it was by the early Christians ; nor have any individuals been more affectionately alive to the spiritual interests of those who were yet involved in the gloomy labyrinths of error, and led astray by the delusive snares of sin ; yet still was it only to be expected, that the first and more tender stirrings of their charity should wing their flight to the bosoms of those beloved objects, who were their companions in the tribulation and in the patience of Jesus.

What, indeed, was the position of the early saints ? By the grace of God they had become brethren and sisters of one Divine Parent ; they were placed upon a footing of friendship as interminable as were their prospects of heavenly felicity, and they

were all bending their course to one illustrious destination. But this is not all: whilst yet upon their pilgrimage to their Father's house, they were mutually exposed to a variety of inconveniences and trials, in which it became them, as partakers of the same grace and the same hope, to exercise an interchange of sympathies and affectionate kindness. This is the true theory of a Christian's position with respect to his fellow-saints: and we have only to refer to the page of ancient record, to find that such also was the practice to which the primitive followers of Christ reduced that theory, and exemplified it in their lives.

To those indeed, who had just been emancipated from the demoralizing influence of heathenish superstition, and who were yet surrounded by all the emblems of their former idolatrous practices, taunted by their acquaintances for their apostacy from the Pagan rites, and annoyed and persecuted by their malicious neighbours,—to persons thus situated, the value of a Christian friend could not fail to be highly appreciated:

and the Christian believer, sensible of the strength and the comfort which he had himself derived from a similar intercourse, could not but be sufficiently aware of the obligations imposed upon him of extending, in his turn, the right hand of fellowship to successive believers.

In this manner, it may be imagined, the communion of saints would first have its origin. But besides this, it was pressed upon the converts to Christianity as a duty of paramount obligation by the Apostles in their various exhortations and epistles. "If," says St. Paul to the members of the Philippian church, "there be any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory : but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you which was

also in Christ Jesus ; who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God ; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. ii. 1—8.) And it is, doubtless, to the fact of that church having eminently manifested in their conduct that spirit of love and zeal in behalf of their fellow-creatures, especially of their fellow-saints, which the example of Christ and the maxims of the gospel are intended to inspire, that induced the commendation, which the Apostle makes in his epistle, of " the women that laboured with him in the gospel, with Clement also, and others his fellow-labourers, whose names are in the book of life." (Phil. iv. 3.) Nor will an allusion to the circumstances connected with the mission of Epaphroditus to Rome, be inappropriately referred to, as illustrating the practical nature of their obedience to the apostolical precepts. They

had sent him thither to sympathize with their venerable pastor in his bonds : whilst thus engaged, their amiable messenger had fallen sick, and no sooner had they received intelligence to that effect, than their anxiety on his account is so feelingly expressed, that in order to allay their apprehensions for their friend, the Apostle, immediately upon his recovery, hastens to send him back to Philippi, observing, in the letter of which he made Epaphroditus the bearer, “ I sent him the more carefully, (in consequence of your apprehensions, and of his having but so recently recovered,) that when ye see him again ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful : receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life to supply your lack of service toward me.” (Phil. ii. 28—30.) What a delightful exemplification is here presented of the doctrine in question ! Indeed, it is impossible to say which is to be admired most ; the love displayed by the Philippians both towards St. Paul and Epaphroditus, the anx-

iety of the latter to fulfil his interesting commission even at the hazard of his life, or the tender sympathy that induced the Apostle, in consideration of their fears respecting him, to make the sacrifice of his services, by sending him so hastily back to his friends.

And with the view more effectually to strengthen each other's hands in their profession of faith in the gospel, and of love towards each other, the first believers would of course hold frequent assemblies of all those in a neighbourhood who had espoused the cause of Christ. These meetings, in consequence of the opposition that was made to them, and the unrelenting fury with which the Christians were pursued, were chiefly held under the covert of the night, and in upper rooms, or in other remote and sequestered spots. And thus forsaking the world, and forsaken by it, their affections would naturally become concentrated upon the great object for whose cause they thus endured persecution, as well as upon their comrades in grace and in suffering.

Whilst, however, the position of the early

Christians was one of peculiar trial and affliction, it must also be admitted that they possessed advantages that were incommunicable to believers in after times. One of these advantages, and certainly not one of the least, consisted in their having had the privilege of occasional intercourse with those who had seen and known the Saviour during his abode upon the earth. And although this remark will not hold good with reference to the churches distant from the scene of our Lord's advent, yet the very recent occurrence of the events upon which the faith of the Christian believers was founded, could not fail to prove a powerful ground for conviction, and a novel and interesting subject of consideration. Few, however, would be the districts, which, unvisited by any of the original disciples or acquaintances of Christ, but, like Philippi, would have been cheered by the occasional presence of a Paul, a Timothy, a Clement, a Polycarp, an Ignatius, or some of those messengers of the churches, who had lighted their lamps at the Pentecostal flame. And even after

the lapse of time sufficient to have borne away the Apostles, and their immediate successors, what would have been the effect when such a man as Irenæus should get up, and in the midst of a concourse of the saints in a distant church should say, as indeed he does in his writings, "I can describe the very spot in which Polycarp sat and expounded, and how he related to us his converse with John and the rest of those who had seen the Lord ; how he mentioned their particular expressions, and what things he had heard from them of the Lord, and of his miracles and his doctrines." With what sentiments of reverence and affection would such characters be welcomed by those who had already yielded credence to the truths which it formed the occupation of these sainted men to publish ! The presence of such an individual would add a solemnity and a freshness of experience to their religious meetings altogether peculiar to the primitive era of the church. Nor little less thrilling would have been the effect, where there happened to be among the group of

devout worshippers, any disciple, however humble, who had been favoured with a personal knowledge of the Redeemer, or who, whether at the earliest or somewhat later period of the gospel morning, had witnessed the dawn of that illustrious day, which was appointed never to terminate, ere it had irradiated the utmost boundaries of the earth with the life-giving beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

But in order still more clearly to apprehend their position, let the reader enter, in contemplation, the rude edifice in which the pious believers at Philippi are thus engaged in the public services of religion; let him observe the tearful attention with which they listen to the reading, by a beloved minister or elder, of an inspired epistle. How do the countenances of the assembly vary in expression, indicative of the influence that the different sentiments therein contained are calculated to inspire in their hearts; sentiments, for instance, like those that occur in the very opening words of the epistle addressed to them by St. Paul,—“ Grace be

unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ! I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all, making request with joy, for *your fellowship in the gospel*, from the first day until now. And this I pray, *that your love may abound* yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ, that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast *in one spirit*, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel." (Phil. i.)

And then, in accordance with the benignant spirit of the religion for whose cause they had forsaken the world, and were assembled together, their devotions are no sooner concluded than they direct their sympathies towards each other: they are seen to approach a table upon which is spread a frugal meal; and there, in token of their brotherhood and mutual love, they enjoy, to an amount unappreciated by the world, the harmony and delights of social

intercourse. Inquiries, arising from the tenderest anxiety for each other's welfare, are instituted, as to the state of their families and circumstances, as to the strength and influence of each other's faith and hope, and as to their varied position with reference to their exposure to the taunts and persecutions of their infidel enemies.

And, above all, the incense of Christian charity arises in behalf of their more necessitous brethren : the interest of these lays near their hearts ; and to an extent quite incredible to any but those possessed of like faith with themselves, do they distribute of their substance to those whom their Lord has charged upon them, as his own representatives upon earth. So imperative, indeed, do they consider their obligations, in this respect, that "in a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounds unto the riches of their liberality ;" and "they who formerly loved nothing like their possessions, now spreading their whole stock before their indigent brethren,"¹ induce even

¹ Justin the Martyr.

their enemies to exclaim, "See how the Christians love one another."¹ A scene this, where the ethereal atmosphere of heaven is inhaled, and where the beholder is compelled "to fall down and worship God, and report that God is in them of a truth." (1 Cor. xiv. 25.)²

But retiring from this temple of bliss, and still wending his way in contemplative mood, let the reader enter one of the neighbouring cottages whose inmates have embraced the faith in the Crucified. Here he is welcomed with that courtesy so peculiar to the cheerful and devoted Christian; and if, in the character of a Christian himself, he announces to the humble hosts his possession

¹ Tertullian.

² At the Passover, and generally at all the solemn feasts of the Jews, acts of charity were enjoined and performed: it is said, "They shall not appear before the Lord empty; every man shall give as he is able." (Deut. xvi. 16, 17.) And from thence came the pious custom in the beginning of Christianity, that the people, when they came to the Lord's table, offered bread and wine, corn and oil, and such like things, for the support of God's ministers, and the relief of the poor; out of these in many instances they made their *Agape*, or feasts of charity for the poor."—*Home's Scripture History of the Jews*, vol. iii.

of like precious faith with themselves, by the utterance of the prescribed benediction of "Peace be unto this house," how welcome is his reception ! Their deportment is frank, and their countenances beam under the influence of the pure flame that ascends from the sanctified altars of their hearts ; and if but one spirit actuates all the members of the family ; if, like the family of Lydia, all be converts to the faith, how unmixed is their felicity ! Exposed without, it is true, to the sneers, and ill language, and ill deeds of those around them, who remain under the malignant dominion of error, they find in their humble domicile, and in the affections of its pious occupants, a refuge and a solace which none know adequately how to prize, but they who have been similarly situated. Reciprocal as are their sentiments, as much so are their experiences. Hath one occasion for joy ? they all rejoice. Doth one suffer trouble ? they all participate in his woe, and seek to mitigate his sorrow by bearing it upon their hearts, and by ceaselessly commending their afflicted companion

to the sympathy and grace of their Saviour. Struck with admiration at the repose from all the contending elements of sin which he here observes, and bidding adieu to these fellow-heirs of eternal life, may not the reader be supposed to proceed on his journey, refreshed as it were by the stream of Christian love and communion that he has discovered thus silently flowing by the way side ?

And then, with reference to the communion of spirits as displayed in the instance of those of the suffering members of the church, who were more especially the subjects of persecution. With these did the early believers peculiarly and deeply sympathize ; no sooner had a profession of the faith subjected one of their members to suffering, let his station in society have been what it would, but the individual immediately became an object for whom was expressed the most affectionate interest. Anxiety of the most intense degree was excited as to whether his profession was of that nature that would be likely to induce the maintenance of it at all hazards. Thus, when a female named Blandina, who

had been delicately brought up, and who possessed every polite accomplishment, was torn from her friends and exposed to lingering torments, apprehensions were entertained that, repeatedly fainting under the hand of the executioner, she would be led to bring upon herself the guilt of denying "the Lord that bought her," and of thus, in the sight of the world, falsifying the pretensions of their holy religion to support the mind under the most appalling inflictions. Her weakness, however, was made strong; her constancy remained unshaken, and the apprehensions of those that surrounded her were at length relieved by witnessing the triumphant termination of her sufferings. The more their enemies increased the means of inflicting pain, and the more vociferous their persecutors became in their utterance of threats as to what should be the ultimate result of those pains, the more did the Christians redouble their exhortations, and their persuasive entreaties, and their exhibition of affectionate solicitude to encourage the sufferer to hold on in his integrity.

Wherever their enemies conducted them,—whether to the rack or to the places of execution, which were generally without the walls of the city,—thither did crowds of their fellow-saints follow them, and there did they stand by them, with the view to pour into their hearts the balm of consolation, to admire their constancy, and by their example to fortify themselves against similar trials. And, in manifesting all this interest on behalf of their suffering brethren, there was the utmost sincerity; for whilst they thus endeavoured to instigate their friends to an unflinching adherence to their Christian profession, they were perfectly conscious that themselves, before the expiry of many hours, might be placed in circumstances to need the same consolation and the same exhortation to constancy. Numerous indeed are the instances on record in which the sympathy between the early Christian believers and their companions in tribulation is illustrated, and by which the spirit in which the martyrs suffered, throws light

upon the doctrine of the communion of saints. Let the quotation of but one of these instances suffice—an instance indeed to which reference has already been made.¹ O, see that holy confessor, the venerable Ignatius! his heart is moved; not at the dread of imprisonment; not at the horrors of death. Ah, no! He rejoices in the near prospect of his approaching victory over death, even in its most terrific aspect. “Him I seek who died for us,” he exclaimed, “Him I desire who arose again for us. The fire of God’s love burns within me, nor can floods of torment extinguish it.” The circumstance that alone affects him is the expression of sorrowing love and sympathy depicted upon the countenances of his brethren in the faith, the tears and the broken sentences which indicate the feelings that possess the hearts of his beloved friends; this is the only ingredient of bitterness contained in his cup, otherwise redolent of consolation and of bliss; and this alone is what induces him, in anticipation of

¹ See Chap. iii.

his saintly triumph, to exclaim : " O damp not, by those expressions of sorrow, the happiness that I experience in the anticipation of being thus made, even unto death, conformable to my Saviour ;—O suffer me to imitate the passion of my God !" ¹

But it may be said, that the exhibition here given of Christian character is exaggerated, or, at any rate, is inapplicable to any other than the primitive believers. We contend, with respect to both the one objection and the other, that it is not so. Are not the commendatory allusions quoted in the connexion, and composed by inspired contemporaries, a sufficient evidence, not only to the truth of the picture here endeavoured to be portrayed, but also to the obligations of believers in general to the exercise of a similar spirit ? And what, if it be observed that nothing but the most alarming degeneracy in vital Christianity, and its inspiring principles, could possibly dictate a dissent either from the correctness of these delineations, or from the propriety

¹ Ignatius's Epistle to the Romans.

of their forming an indispensable feature of Christian character ?

The early Christians, by their exhibition of the true genius of the religion which they had espoused, certainly approached nearer to its prescribed standard than most professors of the same religion have since done; and thus it is, that they are worthy of the eulogium endeavoured to be given to them in these pages. But can it possibly be said that they went beyond that standard ? can it be said, that they surpassed the requirements of Jesus Christ, and his delegated and inspired Apostles ? If so, the objection is certainly well founded. But to the law and to the testimony, let modern professors of every class and denomination of Christians refer ; let them, as they would be entitled to the honoured name which they bear, inquire reverently and obediently at the holy Oracle ; and let them honestly and fearlessly regard the standard there proposed for the measure of a Christian's love, both towards his Saviour and towards his neighbour. And, with reference to the latter,—to the duty of com-

munion with the saints, and of love to the brethren, and of condescension and charity to those of them who are less gifted and wealthy, let such passages as the following be devoutly pondered : “ Whosoever shall give you a cup of cold water in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily, I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward ; and whosoever shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.” (Mark ix. 41, 42.) “ Ye call me Master and Lord, and ye say well ; for so I am ; if, then, your Lord and Master has washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another’s feet.” (John xiii. 13, 14.) “ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.” (James i. 27.) “ We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren : he that loveth not his brother, abideth in death ; and whoso hath this world’s goods, and seeth his bro-

ther have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" (1 John iii. 14—17.) "If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not, neither bid him God speed; for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 10.)¹

¹ Singular as is the fact, that apostate church, the spiritual tyranny of Rome, possesses, among its members, a society more truly in unison, both in design and practice, with the above-mentioned doctrines, as far as relates to relieving the poor and attending the sick, than is anywhere, or by any party, presented. The writer speaks, and he does so with the most unfeigned reverence, of the SISTERS OF CHARITY. He has had the opportunity of observing their modest and self-denying conduct, and has invariably heard them spoken of in the most unqualified terms of admiration.

CHAPTER VII.

NONCONFORMITY TO THE WORLD A PECULIAR CHARACTERISTIC OF THE FIRST CHRISTIANS.

"Our conversation is in heaven."—Phil. iii. 20.

"It is not sufficient that a Christian be holy, but he must *appear* to be so: the principle of holiness must flow from his heart into his conduct; it should burst forth from the recesses of his mind into the practices of his life."—*Tertullian*.

It is true, that an abandonment of the peculiar maxims and manners of the world has been inculcated and practised by different sects and individuals; that from Diogenes in his tub to the mendicant Brahmin with all his contorted positions, a certain opposition to the tenets and practices of the multitude has ever been exemplified. But it is no less true, that the principle influencing the conduct of every nonconformist to the world, except the Christian, has been infal-

libly that of *self*; it is this which has constituted the mainspring of all their singularity; the orb this around which their motives have invariably revolved.

Christianity, however, whilst it enjoins an estrangement from the popular sentiments and appearances of mankind, in its present degenerate aspect, has a far different centre of evolution, and is directed by far purer and loftier motives. Its votaries, by their abstraction from the habits and spirit of the world, neither pay homage to themselves, nor demand its being rendered to them by others. On the contrary, the Christian's conduct, in this particular, is an evidence of allegiance to a sovereign whose kingdom is not of this world,—whose empire, instead of being characterized by oppression, and discord, and sensual gratification, is one of righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost: it is an acknowledgment of the absolute supremacy of another power than that which has usurped dominion on earth; a mark of submission to other laws than those which regulate the opinions of man-

kind at large: in a word, it is an opposition to every thing that is contrary to the name and to the nature of the Divine Being, and that not out of a principle of pride or vain glory, but that the Sovereign of heaven may be all in all. The motives that influenced the early Christians in assuming this attitude, were in the highest degree powerful and influential. The gospel of the righteous kingdom had been announced to them under circumstances which challenged uncompromising obedience to its accompanying requisitions. The phenomenon of redemption had but recently occurred,—they, or their immediate ancestors, had witnessed the humiliation of the Prince of Life,—the particulars of his earthly exile were fresh on their minds,—his enduring patience—his exhaustless compassion—his unchangeable love. They had either been themselves spectators of the awful solemnities which attended his oblation—the darkening of the heavens and the trembling of the earth, or they had stood, as it were, upon the very threshold of the temple where the mighty expiation had been effected. To

them had been afforded the glorious spectacle of the breaking up of the clouds which had hitherto enshrouded the earth in pagan gloom, the bursting forth of the victorious rays of the Sun of Righteousness, and the first display of the bow of grace in the moral horizon.—To them, too, the news of the gospel had come invested with all the influence of novelty, and accompanied by signs and wonders wrought in the name of the Redeemer,—their attention to the truth had been arrested by the earliest blasts of its silver trumpet, and the tidings of salvation from darkness, and sin, and misery, were announced to them by heralds expressly commissioned by the Holy Ghost. How could the truths of redemption be entertained under such a combination of evidence, without an accompanying acquiescence in all the obligations which the reception of the gospel involves ;—how, under circumstances like these, could the love of God to a sinful world, made manifest by the mission and death of Jesus Christ, find a corresponding sentiment of gratitude in the heart of the

early believer, and there abide a lifeless and unproductive principle ? It were impossible. That sentiment of gratitude must have discovered itself in its immediate and palpable effects,—it must have become, from the moment of its origin, the inspiration of life ; all old things would be done away—all things would become new. The will of that Being, to whom the grateful believer stood so amazingly indebted, would be the object consulted in every deed, in every thought. The early Christians would not—they could not, if that sentiment of gratitude was genuine—look upon the obligations of the gospel as an obstacle to their adherence to its Divine Author—as the imposition of a yoke which they were unwilling to bear. No ; they would delight to acknowledge, by every suitable expression, that love which had condescended to shine upon their abyss of woe—which had displayed itself by raising them from such a depth of misery to such a height of felicity ; and which was accompanied in its manifestation by such a mystery of circumstance. Alive to their true position, as the

objects of redeeming love, their language would be, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us. What shall we render unto him for all his benefits?" They would turn instinctively to the bright Exemplar which had been so recently exhibited upon earth, in the person of their Redeemer, they would seek to be conformed to the spirit and temper which he had so luminously portrayed, and they would rejoice to learn and to follow the directions which he had left for their guidance: and that such was the conduct which the early Christians exemplified, the whole of their history proves. Nor has the spiritual nature and elevating tendency of the gospel ever been more clearly apprehended, or more scrupulously acknowledged, than it was by the first professors of Christianity. It was this approximation, indeed, to the high standard of Christ's religion, which formed the basis of their nonconformity to the world; and it is to this that all their singularity is to be attributed.

This principle of nonconformity did not,

however, as many have erroneously supposed, involve in it such a seclusion from society, as in a few centuries afterwards was manifested by the ascetic eremite, who delved into the depths of the desert, in order more effectually to avoid the interruption of his devotions; and there, in the stillness of solitude, unmolested by the intrusion of men, or the cares of the world, hold ceaseless communion with God and his own heart.¹ Whatever may be pleaded in the behalf of such a retirement from the world, it is certain that it is utterly inconsistent both with the spirit and the precepts of the gospel. A Christian is

¹ "The primitive monks were quite another sort of people from those of later times. They appear at first to have been driven out by persecution, into mountains and deserts, rocks and caves, where they lived a life of devotedness to God, without intermeddling in affairs either of church or state."—*Reeve's Apologies*.

This opinion is confirmed by such sentiments as those expressed in the following quotation from one of the early monastic writers: "Of one thing I admonish you; beware of Antichrist. For woe unto you, if you come to fall in love with walls, to reverence the church of God in buildings and temples. Woe unto you, if you rest in these. Can you doubt that it is in these that Antichrist will erect his throne? Give me forests, dens, and prisons: these are the most secure: in these it was that the prophets prophesied by the Spirit of God."—*Hilarius*.

represented by the great Teacher of religious ethics, as illuminated by the Father of lights, not merely with a view to his own individual benefit, but that by his holy conduct in all his intercourse with others, he may, as a planet in his own sphere, aid in dispelling the darkness induced by the night of sin.

Nor did this principle of nonconformity denote, in any degree, the abandonment of any of the usual occupations, or of the innocent enjoyments of life. On the other hand, the Christian believer is strictly enjoined to be diligent in business, to provide honestly for his family, and to use this world's goods as not abusing them. Much less did this principle encourage any thing approaching to the display of an ostentatious parade of superiority to others, or of moroseness and distance of behaviour towards unbelievers. Such conduct, in fact, is diametrically opposed to the very essence of Christianity, which consists in the possession of a meekness of mind which vaunteth not itself, and is not puffed up; which, conscious of its own deficiency in all things, is ready to

esteem others better than itself ; in the exercise on the part of a believer of that philanthropy of heart, of that sympathy for his fellows, that he is willing to become all things to all men, that he may be the means of recommending to their approval that religion which constitutes his own felicity.

The first, and the most apparent feature of the nonconformity to the world which characterized the early Christians, consisted in an entire abandonment of the idol-temples, and an utter aversion and contempt for the idolatrous practices which had formerly held them in thrall, and which prevailed even in countries the most polished and enlightened. This singularity is expressly stated as a charge against them, in the celebrated letter of Pliny, the Roman Consul, to the Emperor Trajan ; and for this opposition to the current opinions and practices on the subject, it was, that they were exposed to ridicule, to odium, and, in thousands of instances, to cruel death. But ah ! how could they, into whose minds the light of truth had once found access, and which had discovered to

them the being, the glory, and the consistency of the one living and true God—which had instructed them as to their position in reference to Him, and which had brought them nigh by the blood of the Lamb—how could they ever debase themselves, and dishonour the Eternal, by the most distant allowance, either in themselves or in others, of homage being rendered to any but Him whose existence and perfections had been thus unveiled to their astonished and admiring apprehensions? How could they, whose love and gratitude stood engaged at such an expensive consideration as the death of Christ, dare for a moment to look with complacency upon those altars from which had formerly ascended their offerings to unknown and unknowing gods—altars which now stood the sad memorials of their former ignorance, and depravity, and moral destitution?¹

1 “One of the principal reasons of the severity with which the Romans persecuted the Christians, seems to be the abhorrence and contempt with which the latter regarded the religion of the empire. For though the Romans gave an unlimited toleration to all religions which had nothing in their tenets dangerous to the *commonwealth*, yet they would not permit that of *their ancestors*,

A second feature which marked the non-conformity to the world exhibited by the early Christians, consisted in the value which they put upon time, and the manner in which that circumstance induced them to employ it. A man, it has been said, may be known by the company in which he delights: with equal propriety may it be observed, that a man is known by the manner in which he occupies his time. From the moment a true Christian becomes such, he attaches an importance to time, which, when viewed in connexion with his prospects with reference to eternity, may, at first sight, appear paradoxical. This apparent contradiction vanishes, however, when it is recollected that time is the Christian's season for sowing—eternity the harvest; that as a man sows, so also shall he reap; as wisely and industriously as is employed the former season, as welcome and felicitous will prove the latter.

But look at the manner in which unbe-

which was established by the laws of the state, to be turned into derision, nor the people to be drawn away from their attachment to it."—*Mosheim*.

lievers of every class pass the precious season of time. Some take the gay and flowery path of vain amusements and dissipating pleasures; they spend their day of life in one monotonous round of fashionable delirium. Some dry up their intellects in exploring the laws of the works of that Being whose existence they either deny, or whose light and grace their philosophical pride disdains to seek. Some pursue the dangerous tracks which promise to conduct them to the pinnacle of renown; whilst others bury their senses in the grave of filthy lucre, and of sordid covetousness. The object pursued by each class of these individuals has no reference whatever to a future state of existence; it has neither place nor name in that eternity to which every human intelligence is destined.

Far other is the conduct and the ambition of the Christian. The object proposed by him, instead of being limited to the contracted space of time, is an object as vast and interminable as is the being of the Divinity—an object which involves in its grasp the in-

terests both of time and of eternity—an object which constitutes the inspiration and the felicity of the celestial hosts—an object sought on the part of the believer, by the dedication of body and soul, of life and all to Him in whom he lives, and moves, and has his being; it is “glory to God in the highest, honour and glory, might, majesty, and dominion to him that sitteth upon the throne, and who reigneth for ever and for ever!” How beautifully indeed is the conduct of the early Christians—of all true Christians, described in this particular, by an inspired Apostle, “redeeming the time;” literally, buying it up, as the most valuable offering which can possibly be procured, to render in oblation to Him, to whom all belongs, and to whom all is due.

A third characteristic of this nonconformity, and the last to which we have space to refer, was founded in the contempt of the early Christians for the gaudy and expensive decoration of their houses and of their persons. To this extravagance the heathen have generally been remarkably addicted,

and so especially was this the case with regard to the ancient inhabitants of Greece and Rome, that their legislators were induced, at some periods, to issue edicts with the view to restrain the exhibition of this passion within prescribed limitations. But more is the shame, the heathenish custom of lavishing expense upon articles of household gear and of personal apparel,¹ is not so singular even at this epoch of moral improvement, and in this country of religious profession, as to require, in order to the appre-

¹“For the proud and haughty stomachs of the daughters of England are so maintained with divers sorts of costly apparel, that, as Tertullian, an ancient Father, saith, there is left no difference in apparel between an honest matron and a common strumpet. Yea, many men have become so effeminate, that they care not what they spend in disguising themselves, ever desiring new toys, and inventing new fashions. Therefore a certain man that would picture every countryman by his accustomed apparel, when he had painted other nations, he pictured the Englishman all naked, and gave him cloth under his arm, and bade him make it himself as he thought best, for he changed his fashion so often, that he knew not how to make it.”—*Homilies appointed to be read in churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth*. The Homily against excess in apparel.—The volume, as now printed, bears upon its title-page, “reprinted for the use of private families;” and certainly it were well if the plain and wholesome truth, as there exhibited, was made more familiar by the frequent perusal of that excellent work,

hension of the subject, the elaborate illustration of quotations from either the historic or satiric writers of antiquity. This splendid evil is still dominant ; foppery and finery are still the bane of every grade of society. But, what is worse, the professors of Christ's holy, and humble, and self-denying religion, are now inoculated with the same infection. The barrier, in this respect, between the Christian and the infidel, the believer and the merely Christian-heathen, is swept away ; and that simplicity and true elegance of attire and of domestic garniture which formed such a lovely characteristic of primitive Christianity, is now as much despised by the great bulk of religious people, as gaudy and expensive dress used to be by the early Christians. So express, indeed, was the apostolic precept,¹ so evidently appropriate to the spirit of the gospel was "modest apparel," that had the earlier saints decorated themselves with "brodered hair,

¹ In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, not with brodered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array.—1 Tim. ii. 9.

or gold, or pearls,"—had they dighted their persons or their houses in "costly array," they would be conceived to have denied the Lord that bought them, and to have abandoned both the name and the profession of a Christian.¹ And if the nonconformity to the world described in the foregoing pages be no subject of supererogation, but really a section of the living temple of Christianity, how is it that, as such, it has now so few admirers? The reason is obvious. Professors of religion have amalgamated themselves with the world, and the world with religion—all the broad and distinctive marks of Christ's religion have been studiously erased from modern Christianity, so that, with but few exceptions—exceptions held in abhorrence by the great mass of religious society so called—God and mammon, Christ and Belial, may, as it respects this aspect of Christian profession, be truly said to abide in collision.

O let him who would be a true Christian

¹ If a Christian did but wear a garland (as did the heathen) he was excommunicated.—*Reeves' Apologies.*

beware ! especially let young converts beware ! If there was danger connected with a profession of Christianity formerly, there is no less danger now. Then, the only danger consisted in being exposed to confiscation, imprisonment, and temporary death ; but now in being liable to become the willing captives of the god of this world, who hath blinded the eyes of his devotees, and of being thus borne down with the multitude to the flames of hell. “ Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed in the renewing of your minds, that ye may know what is the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.” (Rom. ii. 2.)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CONDUCT OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS IN TIMES OF SUFFERING.

“ In nothing terrified by your adversaries.”—Phil. i. 28.

See, Anna, see, the glorious sun
Hath reached his heaven-appointed goal ;
Tempests have raged from pole to pole
In vain :—his lofty course is run ;
And Nature, silenced at the sight,
Stands blushing in the tinted light
Emitted from the golden blaze
Of the bright orb's triumphal rays.

'Tis thus, dear Anna, though o'ercastr
With hell-clouds, that without dismay
The Christian holds his heavenly way ;
'Tis thus, all triumphing, at last
He from his mortal course retires,
Bathed in the glory of celestial fires.

“ For unto you,” writes St. Paul to the church at Philippi, “ it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe in him, but to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. i. 29.)

And, indeed, the account of the sufferings to which the early saints in general were exposed, is familiar to every one whose at-

tention has been but superficially devoted to the perusal of the history of the Christian church. No sooner had the blessed Redeemer sealed his testimony with his blood; no sooner had the first believers in the intent and efficacy of his death, rallied round the standard of his cross; no sooner had they formed themselves into a phalanx, which, by its bearing and conduct, manifested the holy object of its crusade, than the enmity of earth and of hell was aroused and marshalled in frightful array, in order to annoy it, and, if possible, to arrest the progress of its march.

The holy, the memorable Stephen had the honour of first falling in the celestial conflict. The malicious designs of the enemies of Christianity were first wreaked upon that sainted veteran; and whilst the ponderous missiles assailed his temples, and felled him from the ranks, unappalled, he shrunk not from the contest, but, more than conqueror, he hailed the victor's crown, triumphantly invoking the name of his glorified Redeemer!

The horrible cruelties inflicted upon the early Christians by the ignoble tyrant Nero,¹ a name become every where synonymous with all that is treacherous, cruel, and oppressive, are but too broadly marked upon the pages of history; cruelties exercised with such barbarity, and to such an extent, that not only are they found recorded by Christian writers, but are carried down to posterity upon the immortal pages of a Suetonius and a Tacitus, themselves enemies to the sect every where spoken against. Whilst the edicts of a Domitian,² a Marcus Antoninus, a Severus, and others of the Roman Emperors, penned with blood and carrying upon their commission the extirpation of Christianity, at the expense of the lives of tens and hundreds of thousands of the most humble, the most benevolent, the most peaceable individuals who ever trod the

¹ "The horrid persecutions under Nero were set on foot in the month of November, in the year 64; and in it, according to some ancient accounts, St. Paul and St. Peter suffered martyrdom."—*Mosheim*.

² Diocletian and Maximin, who reigned in 286, impiously imagining that by their slaughterous persecution they had ut-

earth, proclaim for ever, with what rigour was pursued the war against the original Christians.

And, Oh, with what black, deep strokes does the early scroll of Christian history abound! How does the perusal of every line of it, expand the heart with sentiments of sympathy for the sainted sufferers! Who, for instance, can read without tears of emotion, of their being thrown into the darkest and most infectious dungeons, their hands and feet loaded with irons, having logs of wood hanging upon their necks, with bolted fetters so contrived as to keep them standing with their legs distended; of their being obliged to lay naked upon broken glass,

terly extinguished what they termed the pernicious superstition of Christ, and that they had universally restored the worship of the pagan deities, erected in memorial thereof a triumphal arch, bearing the following inscription,—

DIOCLETIAN. CÆS.
AUG. GALERIO. IN ORI
ENTE. ADOPT. SUPERS
TITIONE. CHRIST.
UBIQ. DELETA. ET CUL.
TU DEOR. PROPAGATO.

Græter Inscript. p. 280.

strewn over the floor of the prison, their wounds being left to fester and putrify, and in that condition often left to die of hunger and thirst; of their being wrapped in combustible garments, and set on fire, that thus, like torches, they might dispel the obscurity of the night; of their being cast, as in the instance of the venerable Ignatius, the prey to the terrific fangs of monsters of the forest; or of their being dragged upon hurdles to places of execution, where they were afterwards put to death by means of every variety of torture which the imagery of hell could devise?

Extraordinary, however, as were the sufferings to which the early Christians were exposed by their devoted attachment to their Lord, and to his cause, as remarkable was the fortitude with which they bore them, and their unflinching adherence to the profession which they had espoused. Too numerous to specify, are the instances on record of their indomitable faithfulness. By faith in their invisible Lord, they endured to the letter the fulfilment of his solemn pre-

dictions concerning the fiery trials to which their attachment to Him would expose them—predictions which cannot even be perused without sentiments of terror. “I am come to send fire on the earth, and what will I if it be already kindled?” (Luke xii. 49.) “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake.” (Matt. xxiv. 9.) Consequences these of an attachment to the Saviour, involving such a desolating confluence of woes, that the bare intimation of them was sufficient to stagger the resolution of every one not inspired to dedicate himself by the most invincible persuasions of duty and gratitude to Him, who had loved him, and given himself for him.

Appalling, however, as were the prospects of the early Christians, upon the assumption of their profession of devotedness to Christ, they shrunk not from the terrific contest; but, armed with unearthly boldness, they entered fearlessly upon their untried and perilous career. Nor could they, without forfeiting the grace, and abandoning the

principles which they had espoused, retract from the daring position which they had once occupied. Of this they were aware, not only from the express announcement of the Lord, but from the deep anxiety manifested by their spiritual leaders, the Apostles, in all the communications which from time to time they addressed to them. The earnestness with which the duty of perseverance is repeatedly and solemnly urged, and the imperious importance with which it is regarded, may be gathered from such passages as these: "For ye have need of patience; that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise; if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him." (Heb. x. 35—38.) "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you, but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy—for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you." (1 Peter iv. 12—14.) "Wherefore,

seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God ; for consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself—lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” (Heb. xii. 1—3.) “Be ye mild at their anger, humble at their boastings : to their blasphemies return prayers ; to their error firmness in the faith.” ¹

Thus engaged by the solemn intimations and express requirements of their Lord and Saviour, and by the precepts and encouragements of the holy Apostles, the early Christians preserved in all their trials, however severe, the most unshaken spirit of humble firmness : when they were reviled, they reviled not again ; when evil was inflicted, they

¹ Ignatius's Epistle to the Ephesians.

sought no opportunity of retaliation, when the apparatus of death stood before them, and their insulting foes prepared to gorge their eyes and to stain their hands, with the innocent blood of their victims, no murmur, no repining, escaped their lips, and in the palid moonlight of Death's dim vale, their only sighs consisted in aspirations, couched in the language of celestial benevolence: "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." (Acts vii. 59.) Thus it was, that emphatically "glorying in tribulation," they regarded their chains as the ornaments with which they were adorned against the time of martyrdom, even as a bride for the day of her espousals;¹ thus it was that they challenged their adversaries, saying, "What is danger to a Christian believer, whom paradise invites to its bowers, and for whom the plenteousness of the heavenly realms is prepared?"² and thus it was, that when Basil, threatened by Valens, was asked whether he did not fear the power that, as emperor, he possessed,

¹ Eusebius.² Cyprian.

the holy saint was heard to reply, "Wherefore should I fear? What canst *thou* do, that *I* cannot suffer? Confiscation of estate cannot hurt him, that has nothing to lose but a few threadbare garments and a small collection of books; nor can banishment be an evil to him to whom all places, as belonging to the empire of God, are alike, and in any of which a Christian is but a pilgrim and a stranger. Torments I dread not: this infirm body can scarcely survive more than a single stroke; and as for death, that will I welcome, as introducing me at once to my God, for whose sake I am at all times ready either to live or to die." ¹

Where, it is triumphantly asked, is the philosophy, which has ever inspired the martyrs of its cause with such a heaven of forbearance and patience as this? Safely may the advocates of Christianity, not only appeal to the benign spirit which it inculcates, but also to the invariable exemplification of it in the holy confession of its truths.

But it may be a subject of inquiry with

¹ Greg. Naz. Orat. in laud. Basil.

some, What was the principle that induced such a display of passive suffering? Be it replied, that the possession of this spirit was part and portion of their birth right as Christians; that it forms an inherent attribute of the religion of Christ, and that as such its exhibition constitutes a paramount obligation upon the professors of Christianity. When the early Christians were won to the Saviour, they were sufficiently aware that they were not enlisting themselves under the banner of a prince emulous of worldly renown, and whose adherents required to figure in splendid habiliments and in prudish parade: they could not but be persuaded that the service in which they were engaging, was a service in which the love and fear of the world formed no ingredient; that it was a service purely moral and spiritual in its enactments and compensations, and that, from the example of Jesus Christ himself, as well as of those who had already devoted themselves to his cause, the most rigid self-denial and passive endurance of wrongs were demanded. The love of God, mani-

fested in the sufferings of the Redeemer, had achieved the conquest of their hearts to the domination of the benign empire of Christianity; and it was this same principle of love, now reflected from the calmed stream of their sanctified passions, which prompted them to the godlike exhibition of the most unruffled tranquillity, under every unhallowed tempest of persecution. And whilst the sufferings of their Lord, involving, as they did, the meritorious means of their salvation, were viewed by them with so much veneration, accompanied by so much gratitude to the Divine Sufferer, it cannot be wondered at that they, who once possessed a heart capable of persecuting the Lord of life, but who had been redeemed from the dominion of sin, and from the vault of perdition, by the heaven-appointed influence of his sufferings and death, should hold in mysterious reverence the possession and the exercise of that patience and submissive fortitude of soul which had characterised their Saviour in his triumphant struggle. They who acknowledged themselves so much indebted

to the sufferings of the Redeemer, could not refuse to cherish the power of endurance; and they into whose hearts had descended a spark of holy, grateful love, could not, without quenching its flame, allow themselves in the exhibition of a principle opposed to its heavenly nature.

There was another motive, however, that armed their breasts against the fire and the steel of their adversaries. It was an estimate of the insignificance of all the sufferings with which they could possibly be afflicted. Great and manifold as were those troubles, contrary to, and hard to be borne as they were by flesh and blood, they had their period of termination; and, as the allotted portion of the saints on earth, they were endured, not merely without repining, but with tranquil cheerfulness. "Hope," says Cyprian, "sustains the mind amidst the ruins of a world: in the exercise of holy patience, the soul remains serene, conscious of the presence and approval of its God." So far, indeed, were the early Christians from being anxious to avoid the troubles to which their

profession of faith exposed them, that they were embraced as the pledges of their saintship, and as the tokens of their Lord's approval of their persons; "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not; if ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as sons." With a hope, therefore, blooming with immortality, they looked forward to the blissful era which should divest them for ever of suffering and of pain, and when those light afflictions, which were but for a moment, should terminate in an eternal weight of glory. It is under the inspiration of such sentiments as these, that the same Cyprian, in his writings, urges his fellow-saints triumphantly to anticipate the death of martyrdom—the death which he himself subsequently endured: thus, speaking of the Apostle Paul, he beautifully and strikingly observes, "He, who through the peculiar favour of God, was caught up into paradise, and there professes himself to have heard unutterable things: he, who glories in having had his faith assured to him by the evidence of sense, expressly tells us.

that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Who, therefore, would not intensely strive to participate in such a state of unutterable blessedness? Who would not dare the torments and sufferings of the present life, to enter upon the felicity of that which awaits us? If soldiers esteem it their honour to return in triumph to their native country, after having subdued their enemy; how much more illustrious must it be to mount in triumph to heaven, after a conquest gained over our great adversary the devil, and with angels, and patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, to rejoice in the sure possession of eternal felicity and glory? Where is the persecution, where the torments which these hopes will not vanquish? A mind possessed of these expectations cannot but remain firm and steadfast. Be it then, that persecution banish us to this or to that spot of the earth; yet is heaven open to us. (Acts vii. 5, 6.) Antichrist may rage and may threaten; but Christ is our defence. Let death come when it will; im-

mortality immediately follows: expelled from this world, we enter the heavenly one. Oh, how great is the dignity of going hence in joy and triumph. We do but close those eyes, which have but a worthless world to entertain them, to open them at once on God and on our Saviour. And then, this is all effected in a moment: quick as thought are you removed from this earthly tabernacle, and transported to celestial mansions. Let but such thoughts as these ever occupy our minds, and it is impossible that the Christian soldier shall ever be foiled."

Encouraged by arguments and examples like these, did thousands of those sainted characters hail, with expressions of exultation, the grim countenance of the blood-stained executioner, and the lambent flame of the smoking pile. Little did they heed the appalling fury of their raging foes; little did they rue the disfigurement of their persons; prostrate, they could not be vanquished—they only fell, to be raised to honours of immortal splendour, and to a recompense of untold worth. The glory

which awaited their peaceful conquest—that glory which consisted in the approval of their God, and of their eternal abode in his palace of bliss—infused courage into their hearts, and made them pant for the triumphant termination of the day of trial. Nor were these the only grounds of their confidence, or the only motive which prompted them to a faithful endurance to the end. They had received great and precious promises, both as to the present communication of celestial aid, and as to their ultimate triumph with the redeemed, in the illustrious courts of their Saviour above. So eminently, indeed, did they possess the all-conquering power of faith, that many are the instances in Christian history, of blissful and transporting visions having been realized, to the utter annihilation of all pain, during the exposure of the body to the most fiendish severities. Often has a reliance upon that promise, “Lo, I am with you alway,” converted the gloom of a prison-vault into a temple of glory, and the sulphurous clouds of a death-fire into frankincense of matchless odour: yea, by

faith, vigorous and triumphant, it was that the Christian confessor, appealing with reverent but peremptory assurance to those declarations of succour, confirmed to the heirs of promise by the immutable oath of the Eternal, (Heb. vi. 18.) obtained the fulfilment of that precious promise in all its length and breadth ; that the groans of the sufferer were turned into hymns of praise and triumph ; that he was made already to apprehend the ecstatic joys of the célestial kingdom ; and that his soul was baptized with streams of that effulgent bliss, which constitutes the untiring enjoyment of the seraphic hosts.

O ye holy band of early victors, who, armed with the divine panoply of faith, first scaled the ramparts which environed the citadel of superstition and of sin, and who first effected a breach in its gloomy battlements ! desperate was your conflict—glorious its results : soon do we hope to see the armies of the living God occupy the advanced posts of the enemy. The celes-

tial cause for which ye strove, resisting unto blood, hath prevailed, and shall yet prevail —“with violence shall that great city be thrown down, and shall find no more place at all; for by its sorceries were all nations deceived, and in her was found the blood of the prophets and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.” (Rev. xviii. 18—24.)

O ye thrice-blessed spirits, arrayed in white, mingling with the seraphs nearest the empyrean throne; whose it is, already to bear the palms of conquest, and to be crowned with the unfading laurels of eternal renown! unworthy followers of your faith and patience, we too would aspire one day to unite with you singing “the song of Moses, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. Alleluia, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!” (Rev. xv. 3, 4.)¹

¹ It was usual, at the funerals of those who had died in the

faith, to carry lights before the corpse, and to sing portions of the psalms or of hymns, significant of the triumphant termination of their earthly warfare. The following verses, according to Chrysostom, were often thus employed: "Return unto thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble: therefore will I not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be removed into the midst of the sea. He will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. The Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge."²

¹ Psalm cxvi.

² Psalm xli.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SECOND ADVENT OF CHRIST ANTICIPATED BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is at hand.”—Phil. iii. 20, and iv. 5.

“The primitive Christians were so animated with the expectation of a kingdom to come, that they did little else but prepare to die.”—*Reeves' Apologies of Justin Martyr.*

NOTWITHSTANDING the numerous opinions that subsist, as to the precise period of our Lord's second coming, it is evident that the early Christians, who were eminently unsophisticated in their interpretation of the words of Divine inspiration, regarded the subject, as they did most others, in the obvious and literal sense in which it is expressed in all those passages of Holy Writ which make reference to it.¹ Whether they lived

¹ This remark is so far from having reference to the Christians after the two first centuries, that for several subsequent

in daily and hourly expectation of that striking event, or whether they should first meet their Saviour upon the opposite banks of the stream which separates the living from those who die in the Lord, it is indisputable that they lived under an apprehension of the certainty and of the suddenness of His coming; and that that persuasion acted as an incessant and vigorous incentive to the conscientious discharge of every duty, and to the most solemn endeavour to be found at all times in a watchful and becoming attitude. Nor will the thoughtful Christian be at all surprised at the vividness of the impression which that expectation made upon the minds of the early saints, if he only examines the various passages in the New Testament, as uttered by Jesus Christ, and as reiterated by his Apostles, upon this

ages the most absurd and fanciful allegories were deduced from, and wrought up with, Holy Writ. The famous Origen, who flourished A. D. 254, may be termed the father of Scripture mystification. "When men who had been educated in the pagan schools, became converts to the Christian faith, they brought with them their philosophical ideas and language, and associated them with the doctrines of Christianity."—*Enfield's History of Philosophy.*

momentous subject. Will he not, rather, be astonished at the apathy which, upon this more perhaps than upon any other Christian subject, has come over the visible church? will he not rather be shocked at the infidelity in which, in this particular, Christians have lately indulged? and will he not be alarmed at the fact of their having to such an extent adopted, if not the language, the spirit of those scoffers who, in the last days, blasphemously inquire, "Where is the promise of his coming? for, since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Not, indeed, that there are many individuals presumptuous enough to fly in the face of the divinely declared purpose of the Son of God appearing in the clouds of heaven, as the final Judge of all; but, assuredly, one of the sins of modern Christianity consists in the want of a religious and influential conviction of the awful suddenness and probable nearness of that wonderful event—an event, the superlative importance of which, is sufficiently attested by the repeated and by the

solemn language in which our Lord has referred to it—an event, the practical influence of which he has condescended, by a variety of illustrations, to enforce upon his followers. And, certainly, than this there is no event announced by the word of prophecy as yet to happen, which, from what stands recorded upon the pages of the inspired Scriptures, will exhibit, in its circumstances so much of sublimity, and so many features of overwhelming interest. No apprehension, it is true, no anticipation of this awful event, is yet observed any where to exist. There, stand the everlasting hills, unmoved from the foundation of the world; and yonder appear the fields, adorned in all the freshness of vernal beauty; and there stand, still objects of admiration, the stupendous pyramids; and there the beauteous monuments of art; and there is seen the pennon floating over the ocean; and there are the abodes of men, still crowded with busy inhabitants, all sedulously engaged in their various pursuits of pleasure, or of wealth, or of fame!

Nevertheless, this reign of security is destined to be broken up. The God who made the world out of nothing, and who suspended it on the breath of his power, has expressly declared, that so soon as his decrees concerning it are fulfilled, it shall experience a total dissolution—that an angel shall descend from the throne of the Eternal, who, placing one foot upon the land and another upon the deep, shall declare with a loud voice, “Time shall be no more”—that the untold millions, who have been entombed far and wide over the face of the earth, or who have been cast into the watery abyss, shall be started from their ghastly slumbers by the thrilling notes of an archangel’s trumpet—that the dead, both small and great, in obedience to the emphatic command, “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment,” shall burst the clods which enshroud them, and haste to their appointed rendezvous among the marshalled armies of the skies—that voices, and thunders, and lightnings, and a mighty earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an

earthquake, and so great, shall indicate the vicinity of unearthly solemnities—that the world, the theatre of so many wonders, shall melt away before the astonished gaze of its former inhabitants—and that the beautiful orb, the sun, and the moon, and all the sparkling host of the firmament, shall fall from their spheres, no more to shine for ever.

Nor less assured, than is its certainty, is the fact of the fearful suddenness that shall mark the event of Christ's second coming. Upon no subject did our Lord, during his ministry on earth, lay more emphasis, nor is there any subject upon which he expended a greater variety and richness of illustration: scarcely ever did he enter upon it, but it was done at such length, as clearly indicates the importance with which he wished his disciples to regard it. To instance which, it is only necessary to refer to the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel, where nearly *one hundred verses* are consecutively occupied in describing the suddenness of his coming, and in enforcing, in

language the most peremptory, the necessity of undeviating vigilance. The unexpected arrival of that awe-fraught circumstance, is there represented, as coming upon mankind with all the signs of terror and dismay that characterized the fearful judgment exercised upon an infidel world ; when the flood-gates of heaven were thrown back, and the rain descended in overwhelming torrents ; when the billows of the desolating deluge rushed foaming through the vales, and when, in their impetuous career, they swept the summit of the proudest mountains ; “ for as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came and took them all away ; so shall also be the coming of the Son of man.” (Matt. xxiv. 37.) It is also compared to the procession of an oriental wedding-party, celebrated, according to the custom, at the hour of midnight, accompanied by the light of flaming torches, which, unexpectedly arriving at the residence of the bride, finds

many of her maiden attendants wrapt in slumber, and unprepared for its reception. "At midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are gone out." (Matt. xxv. 6—8.) And it is also depicted as darting upon the unsuspecting world with the velocity and suddenness of a vivid flash of heaven-kindled fire; "as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also be the coming of the Son of man." (Matt. xxiv. 27.)

And if such will be, not only the certainty, but also the suddenness of the second advent of Christ, who, then, is able to describe the emotions that will possess the hearts of those that shall be still living, the instant the conviction flashes upon the mind, that this event has indeed at length arrived? What words can convey an idea of the fatal damp that, with that conviction, will strike upon the heart! In every other unexpected attack of danger, or surprise, some remedy,

some resource presents itself to fortify the mind; but, upon this occasion, a confused sensation of the vastness of the Divine power shrinks the creature to an atom; one dreadful feeling of desolation, that no means of escape, no human effort can avail, locks up the senses and deprives of all self-possession. Who, indeed, can anticipate, without the extremest emotions of dread, the clouds gathering in midnight denseness; the gloomy darkness, through which the sun renders but faintly visible surrounding objects; the bloody hue of the moon, rising over the hills in the distant horizon; the quick succession of falling stars; the sulphureous exhalations that impede respiration; the earth trembling; its surface cleft with frightful chasms; the flying masses of chaotic matter; the sudden blast of an archangel's trumpet, re-echoing through the air; the bursting of the tombs; the apparition of the millions of revived dead; the instantaneous transformation into immortal substances of the bodies of those that shall have survived; the voice, as the voice of many waters, and as the

voice of a great thunder, that of the celestial pursuivant, proclaiming the titles, and the dignities, and the praises of heaven's eternal Prince, saying, "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him; fear God and give glory to him, for the hour of his judgment is come; even so. Amen!"

Vast were the numbers assembled, and remarkable were the results of the engagements at Marathon, at Zama, at Hastings, and more recently at Waterloo; but what language can depict the absorbing interest of that scene, when the armies of the living God shall be gathered upon the ethereal plains of Armageddon, and when shall be announced the coming of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, to sit an umpire upon the fate of all the individuals of every nation, and kingdom, and people, who, upon that dread occasion, shall stand revealed in all their native malignity, or in all their devoted allegiance? and, above all, how can be adequately conceived the pitch to which will be raised the interest of the assembled world, when shall occur the momentous movement

that shall indicate the arrival of the Son of God, who, with a majesty of aspect infinitely transcending the most exalted of his dazzling retinue, shall, with all the dignity of a God, seat himself upon the throne of his glory ?

But, as the thunderbolts of Divine justice have never been precipitated upon the heads of transgressors, prior to the most impressive and reiterated warnings of impending danger, so have the awful circumstances attending the second advent of Christ, not only been depicted by illustrations the most appropriate and graphic, but they have been invariably accompanied by appeals as solemn and as pathetic as language could possibly convey. Not merely has the danger been minutely portrayed, but the means necessary to be taken, in order to escape therefrom, have been fully made known. With such cautions the writings of the New Testament abound. John the Baptist not only came preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand ; but he announced therewith the necessity of immediate repentance. Not only did Jesus Christ more fully reveal the facts

of the certainty and the suddenness of his future advent, but he peremptorily urged the necessity of that vigilance, by the exercise of which the event may not merely be met without terror, but hailed with sentiments of exultation ; repeatedly exclaiming, “ Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour the Lord doth come,”—“ Therefore, be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh,”—“ Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” And in like manner, and with similar earnestness, were the same admonitions re-echoed by the Lord’s Apostles, and by the early fathers of the church, who, in their preachings and writings, were thus found frequently and solemnly addressing them : “ The end of all things is at hand, be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer,”—“ The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night,”—“ Seeing, then, that these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness ; looking for, and hasting to the day of God ?”

—“Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot and blameless.” (2 Peter iii.)

Now after indications so striking, so alarming, can it be a subject of surprise, that the early Christians lived under such a marked apprehension of the approaching judgment, and that they walked so strictly according to the rules indicated by their Lord and his inspired servants? Is not, rather, their conduct in this particular worthy the imitation of the people of God to the end of time? For, whether the event had been actually realized; or whether, as was the case with many of them, they met their Lord in the blazing fire of persecution; or whether they were called hence in the calm of peaceful slumber; the importance of cherishing a watchful spirit was equally signal. Well, indeed, would it be for the increase of living, influential Christianity, if the same spirit of vigilance was more conspicuous in these latter days of the church; if Christians, losing sight of the amount of time *apparently* re-

quisite to bring about the predicted reformation of the world, would bear in mind, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and that He may possibly cut short his work in righteousness, so that before the arrival of to-morrow's dawn, the period may be announced, when "nations shall be born in a day, and all the ends of the earth be made to see the salvation of God."

Happy were it for the members of the church, if, in the language applied by the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, they could be addressed, "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief; ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day." (1 Thess. v. 4.) Happy, indeed, the case of those favoured individuals, to whom has been transmitted like heavenly confidence with those who, when their Lord declared, "He who testifieth these things, saith surely I come quickly," were heard, with aspirations indicative of their desire to hail the period in which they should be allowed to welcome his appearing, to exclaim, "Amen: even so, come Lord Jesus." (Rev. xxii. 20.)

CHAPTER X.

THE CHARACTER OF THE FIRST MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL.

“ Paul and Timothy, the servants of Jesus Christ.”—Phil. i. 1.¹

THE particular opinions or doctrines which may be entertained, and the particular motives which prove incentives to action, will never fail to give a certain bias to the general conduct ; so that, in order to form an estimate of the character, either of an individual, or of an order of men, it is first of all requisite to inquire into the principles or opinions that govern their conduct, as well as into the motives and affections by which they are influenced. It was thus that the followers of the various sects of phi-

¹ Timothy had accompanied the Apostle Paul on his two voyages to Philippi, and was therefore deservedly dear to the church in that city. It was on this account that St. Paul joined his name to his own, and not because he was in any part the author of the Epistle.

losophers among the ancients exhibited, in their behaviour, the various characteristics of their several creeds; that a stamp of worldliness was impressed upon the entire demeanour of those whose aim was the attainment and enjoyment of objects of a purely earthly and sensual nature; whilst the conduct of those who observed the maxims which go to cherish a love for the acquisition of scientific knowledge and for mental improvement, manifested a behaviour corresponding with the more elevated nature of their pursuits. And certainly, with reference to some of the philosophers of antiquity, it is but just to say, that, had no other revelation been vouchsafed to man, than the glimmering light which was kindled by their efforts, the spread of that light, faint as it was, would have proved a boon to the world, sufficient to have entitled them for ever to the denomination of the benefactors of their race.

In the doctrines taught by the Apostles, however, there was this peculiarity, that, whereas the doctrines of the heathen philo-

sophers either originated with themselves, or were gathered from various sources of merely human authority, theirs were delivered to them, and were to be maintained by them, as emanating from a totally unearthly source—even from God himself. None of them ever laid claims to be the originators of any one single article of faith. They were but “witnesses for the truth ;” and whether in writing or in preaching, they wrote only and spake only in accordance with the letter and spirit of divine revelation. So far had the teachers of the Mosaic ritual misunderstood and misapplied the true meaning of the Old Testament records, that when the purpose for which they had been, from time to time, inspired, became in part accomplished ; when the types and prefigurations of the Levitical economy had been fulfilled ; when the precise time in which it was predicted that that fulfilment should occur had arrived, and when the place in which it should take place had actually witnessed the circumstances of their fulfilment, instead of making any appropriate recognition of the

subject, they had wilfully and wickedly refused attention to every description of evidence that went to prove the fact. The Apostles, therefore, having been "set for the defence of the gospel," (Phil. i. 17,) were appointed to maintain, against the cavils and objections, whether of Jew or of Greek, the important truth, that Jesus, whom the Jews had slain and hanged on a tree, was the predicted Messiah of the Old Testament revelation; that the fact of his being so had been literally proved in all the circumstances of his life and death, and that God himself had acknowledged him as such, by the descent of the Holy Ghost upon him at Jordan, by express declaration heard by themselves, and by his resurrection from the dead, and ascension into heaven.

And that the Apostles were justified in propagating their doctrines, from a conviction of their divine originality, and that those doctrines actually possessed a claim proportionably superior to every other system of religious belief that had ever been proposed, is evident, among other reasons, from their

tendency. Not only do they fully exhibit the fact of the existence, and the nature of the authority of the Divine Being, but they clearly and consistently set forth the position of man, both as to his present condition, and his future destination ; and in doing so they hesitate not to develope his true condition, how much soever it may tend to disturb his treacherous repose. Indeed, it was this peculiar characteristic of the doctrines taught by the Apostles, that rendered them a stumbling-block to the Jews, and that made them to be esteemed foolishness by the Gentiles. Thus, the truth that stood at the front of their doctrines, was one that, above all things, was humbling to the pride of man. It declared the fact of his utter alienation from God ; it assured him that his mind was darkened by reason of error ; that in his pursuit after happiness he had utterly lost his way, and that he had not only lost his way, but his liberty also ; that he had become enslaved by his passions ; and that, having thus estranged himself from God, and yielded his members instruments of unrighteousness, he

had exposed himself to consequences more awful than had ever been conceived, even in the poetic imagery of the most renowned authors of fabulous story. All this, and more than this, was assumed and announced when the Apostles preached the doctrine of repentance.

And not only were the doctrines taught by the Apostles humbling to the pride of man, but they possessed, at the same time, a tendency highly consolatory. In awakening mankind to a knowledge of their sad condition before God, they left him not in a state of hopelessness; they looked not on him in his exposure to the tempest, without attempting to offer him relief, without aiding him to attain a position of security. They tell him that he is lost, but they tell him by what means he may be saved; they expose his moral defilement, but they direct him to a fountain open for sin and uncleanness; they tell him that he is guilty, but they announce to him the doctrine of remission of sins through faith in Christ Jesus; they warn him, being justified, "to go and sin no more," but in language as

strange as it would be unwarrantable on the part of any other system of doctrines than those of the gospel, they are heard to whisper to their converts, "Rejoice in the Lord always : and again I say, Rejoice. Be careful for nothing : but in every thing by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." (Phil. iv. 4, 6.)

But further than this, the doctrines of the Apostles manifest the divinity of their origin, and consequently their vast superiority over all other systems of morality, by their purifying and elevating tendency. The doctrines of human philosophy necessarily partake of all the imperfections incident to the source from whence they are derived ; and however well the mind may define the duties and obligations of life, yet will the heart, in its unregenerate state, be ever found to revolt from any thing like an undeviating compliance with the maxims that may be required to be observed. To this objection the obli-

gations of the gospel cannot be said to be liable. Heavenly in their origin, they are spiritual and holy in their enactments ; and although they are brought to the door of individuals, all of whom, in the first instance, are incapable either of appreciating or of fulfilling them, yet do they provide for this defect of the human heart, by exhibiting to the believing mind, together with the obligations they impose, a regenerating influence, whereby power to fulfil them may be obtained. And that the doctrines of the gospel have, both in individual instances, and in the case of society in general, actually exerted a great moral and purifying influence, is most demonstratively proved by the fact, that into whatever locality the light of the gospel has penetrated, the miasma of profligacy has ever been found to lose that malignity which, in every instance whatever, prevails in districts purely heathenish ; so that “ a measure of virtue, that would have singled out an ancient philosopher as a wonderful exception from the rest of the world, is absolutely necessary, in a Christianized

country, to constitute a character of ordinary decency." And if such has been the general effects of the doctrines of the gospel, if they have so far raised the level of morals in society at large, what shall be said of their influence when viewed in their operation on the mind, and heart, and conduct of the avowed and sincere believer in them? Not only does the reception of the truths of the gospel produce a real change in the views and perceptions of the mind, not only do they dispossess the heart of the love of the unhallowed and deceitful pleasures and practices of the world, but when they come brightened by a ray of that light, by the radiance of which they were at first inspired, when they come accompanied by an effluence of the sanctifying Spirit of God, they manifest their holy and purifying property, by producing at once an utter detestation of all moral defilement, and an insatiable desire to be conformed to the high standard of moral excellence which they prescribe. Purity becomes the element in which the soul delights to breathe. The inhabitant of earth

is even now made to participate in the holiness that characterizes the sinless intelligence of heaven; and the expiring saint, vanishing from the abodes of men, is made a participant with seraphs in the beatific enjoyments of a celestial state.

Remarkable, however, as were the doctrines taught by the Apostles, the motives by which they were influenced were no less distinguished. They were "the servants of Jesus Christ;" a denomination in which they eminently gloried. As such, therefore, the motive of obedience would naturally tend to induce much in their conduct for which they were celebrated. And if, indeed, the dispensation of the gospel so far surpasses that of every other dispensation in glory, it may justly be expected that the lives and practices of its delegated propounders, should be found to display a superiority equally conspicuous above those either of the Jewish Rabbis or of the philosophers who taught under the gloomy reign of pagan darkness. This expectation is accordingly anticipated by Jesus Christ; and

the characteristics, as specified by himself, of a Christian minister, are in admirable keeping with the superior claims of his heavenly dispensation : so that, whilst he has attached to the office every conceivable emblem of distinction, he has also charged it with the most peremptory and exalted requirements,—requirements as foreign to the genius of every other system, as are the truths which lay at the foundation of Christianity. Not only as the Apostle and the great High Priest of their profession, did Jesus Christ amply pourtray in his own conduct, during the period of his ministry, every trait necessary to the formation of the apostolic character, but he frequently and explicitly declared what would be expected from his disciples in their capacity of ministers of the gospel. They were directed to take up their cross ; a favourite expression of our Lord's, probably from the impression made upon his human nature, in prospect of his ultimate passion. They were to submit to all the inconveniences, and to all the present degradation to which the prosecu-

tion of their evangelical labours should expose them, even as he submitted to carry his cross to the place of execution, and there to die thereon. And certainly nothing more appropriate can possibly be conceived than are the obligations of pastoral character, when viewed as embodied in the lives of the first ministers of the gospel. In accordance with the very terms of their engagement by their Divine Master in his arduous service, they cultivated the most rigid and unvariable self-denial,—a self-denial which not merely regarded the outward behaviour, but which extended to the most subtle volitions of the mind; which set at nought connexions and prospects, however flattering and seductive, and which reduced every power and faculty to the prescribed and heaven-appointed standard. And in this obligation, an eternal fitness is at once perceivable: had they been allowed to indulge in the luxuries and ambition which have since so scandalously characterized many of those engaged in the sacred profession, how would their stations and

propensities have accorded with the very nature of the precepts of the gospel? How, in fact, would they ever have been competent instruments in achieving the moral reformation of a world?

The obedience and self-denial exercised by the primitive ministers of the gospel, however, formed but the demonstration of another motive, which exerted a most commanding influence over their conduct. That motive was love. This was the incense that perpetually ascended from the altar of their hearts, and which conveyed, in its ascent to the eternal throne, their ceaseless aspirations after conformity in all things to the divine will, and their assurance of uncompromising devotion to the great object involved in the discharge of their priestly functions. It was love to God that compelled them to a display of conduct little imitated in the present, although, in some respects, no less dangerous era; that led them to forsake houses, and friends, and property, and comfort; to expose themselves, to be esteemed beside themselves, to hunger,

to thirst, to the derision of the wise of this world, and to the cruel and relentless persecution of Satan's adherents. It was love, love to Him who had separated them unto the gospel of God, and who had appointed them to the apostleship, that emboldened them fearlessly and faithfully to go forth and proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, to invest the strong holds of heathen superstition, to announce the rise of the Sun of Righteousness, and to point those who sat enveloped in the shades of moral darkness, to the light of the glory of God, shining in the face of Jesus Christ.

No religion besides that which the Apostles professed, had ever inspired its ministers with a principle like this. Other systems of religious belief have secured the services of their priests by motives of fear, of ambition, or of gain, but none have ever engaged them by the motive of love ; and for this reason,—no other religion presented, as an object of worship, a being like God,—whose character, the more it is known, the more it commands veneration. The Apos-

tles had received their knowledge of God from Jesus Christ; they had witnessed the exemplification of the divine benevolence in his life; they had experienced his friendship; they had tasted of his loving-kindness; and they were assured that their faithfulness would secure the divine approval, and a recompense in eternity. Instructed, therefore, in the character of God, and in the holy nature of his dispensations towards mankind, and conscious themselves of his favour, they were inspired to seek, by every possible and sanctified means, the promotion of the knowledge and the reverence of his holy name among men, the extension of his dominion on earth, and the peopling of his blissful realms with deathless spirits, redeemed from this chaos of darkness and of enmity to his rightful rule.

But besides the motives of obedience and love, there was yet another motive that prompted the zeal of the apostolical character. Having themselves participated in the saving benefits of the gospel, the ministers of Christ would not fail to become powerfully

influenced by a sentiment of pity for their fellow-creatures, as estranged from all blissful connexion with God, and as awaiting an awful and irrevocable destiny in a future state. And thus it was, that in them the tide of compassion that overflowed the bosom of Immanuel, having found a channel by which to reach and to bless the world, there was induced in them a conduct so widely different from that of every other denomination of teachers of morality. This it was that caused their office to exhibit a characteristic so much the reverse of a sinecure; and that, instead of a magnificent temple, such as had formed the archives of the Pagan Oracles, having been consecrated at Jerusalem or elsewhere, in which to guard the records of the gospel, and in which to give exclusive attendance to those who, from time to time, might be induced to inquire into the sacred mysteries; they were led to adopt the world at large, being the theatre of God's mercy, as the divinely appointed arena of their labours, and to consider that their work remained unaccom-

plished, until their "word had gone out into all the earth, and until they had preached the gospel to every creature."

And, in referring, by way of illustration to the subject in general, to any particular instance in which these doctrines and motives have manifested the nature of their influence on the spirit and conduct, it were impossible to select one more striking than that presented in the history of the eminent founder of the Philippian church. Prior to his miraculous conversion, the apostle Paul had been placed in circumstances which had procured for his naturally gifted mind the attainment of every literary accomplishment at that period in vogue among his countrymen. For the love of God and for the love of souls, however, all those splendid talents with which he had been endowed, and which he had so successfully cultivated, were laid at the foot of the cross, and exclusively dedicated, from that moment, to the service of Him who had arrested him on his career of ignorant zeal against the persecuted saints at Damascus. Overwhelmed to blindness by the

manifested glory of the Redeemer, he who had just presented the spectacle of a wolf hastening from the lair in quest of his prey, retires with all the kindred meekness of a lamb into the midst of that fold, whose destruction he had so recently threatened. Praying, he is conducted to Damascus. There he, of whom one of the disciples, with mingled feelings of fear and distrust, observes, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to the saints at Jerusalem," is invested with the apostolic insignia, and his destiny is announced by the Holy Ghost in the following terms of his extraordinary ordination : "He is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel ; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." Accordingly, he, who a few days since was observed posting on the road accompanied by an escort to aid in the execution of his slaughterous commission, himself, in the character of a persecuted Christian, escapes from that city, in which he had

meditated his fearful projects, and that too, by the assistance of the very individuals who had been just before the objects of his rage. "The disciples, seeing the Jews waited at the gates to kill him, took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." (Acts ix. 25.)

From this memorable period of the Apostle's history, what a revolution is observed to have occurred in his sentiments. "What things were gain to me," is now his confession, "those I count loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith; that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death; if, by any means, I might attain the resurrection of the dead."

(Phil. iii. 8—11.) And from this moment, until his life's-blood was shed in devotion to his high and holy calling, what a pattern of love, and faithfulness, and zeal, did he exhibit ! What an indefatigable missionary ! How numerous his journeys ! how perilous his adventures ! Nor were there otherwise features in his history, unworthy of some of the most remarkable characters who have flourished in the pages of biography. How imposing, for instance, his situation when viewed as standing, in all the conscious dignity of his calling, upon Mars-hill : as there pointing to an altar erected to *the unknown God*, and convicting the philosophers of the far-famed Athens of superstition : when viewed as dissolving at Ephesus, by the light of the gospel, the spell of idol-mystery, so that "they who had used curious arts, brought their books together, and publicly destroyed them : " or when viewed as pleading, with such demonstrative eloquence, his cause before Roman governors, as to convert the judgment bench into the culprit's bar ! Behold him, too, when his campaign of

mercy was brought to a close, and when he was conducted a shipwrecked prisoner to Rome, the place in which he had so often expressed his desire to preach the Saviour. There, in a house which he had hired, and in which he was allowed to reside, although under the surveillance of imprisonment, did he receive, for the last two years of his life, "all that came unto him;" still preaching with such zeal and confidence the things which concern the Lord Jesus, that his bonds in Christ were manifest even in the palace, as well as in all other places. (Phil. i. 13.) And when he was no longer permitted to pass from city to city, warning and comforting the followers of Christ, how far was he from yielding to the paralyzing influence of melancholy or regret! To the truth of this let his numerous epistles declare—those epistles which tell of his devotedness to the cause for which, *with joy*, he had suffered the loss of all things; and of his love for his friends and children in the gospel! How, in fact, can those letters be perused without sentiments of admiration

for their sainted author, or without emotions of sympathy, both for the writer and for his favoured correspondents? Paul, "the aged!" Paul, "in bonds!" Paul, "ready to be offered up!" Oh, how worthy of veneration! Where—where is he upon whom his mantle hath descended!

Whatever opinion might have been formed of the apostolical character, by those whose sentiments and practices were in opposition to the doctrines of the gospel, can it be for a moment imagined that Christians, possessing the grace which did the early saints, and who, under God, were chiefly indebted to the ministers of Christ for the light and comfort involved in their enjoyment of the gospel, should be wanting in appropriate sentiments of love and veneration for their spiritual guides?—that the zeal of those sainted heroes, the devoted diligence with which they fulfilled their duties, and the fervent and disinterested love which they displayed for the church of Christ in general, and for the objects of their immediate charge in particular, should be witnessed

with indifference, and remain unrequited by a suitable return of grateful conduct on the part of those on whose account their labours were expended? Not only is the supposition contrary to every rational and appropriate inference, but the evidence afforded to the contrary is most obvious and abundant. The love and gratitude with which the early Christians regarded their fathers in the gospel, forms, indeed, the frequent and glowing subject of congratulation in the apostolic and other primitive epistles ; nor can any thing be more affecting than are several of the scenes which, as recorded on the pages of Christian history, go fully and feelingly to attest the fact. Frequently is this spirit referred to by the Apostle Paul, in his various epistles, as having been exhibited towards himself by various individuals, and by various churches, to whom he had been personally known, and by whom he had had reason to be beloved. And, although the estimation in which this veteran for Christ was held by the members of the church at Philippi, has already

been described, yet will a single reference to his own express testimony be found most abundantly, and in this place most appropriately, to confirm the fact, both of his own affection for them, and of their deep devotion to him. What more striking figure, for instance, could possibly have been employed, whereby to convey an idea of the extent of that sympathy which subsisted between the Philippian believers and himself, than that in which he represents their mutual attachment, under the notion of a partnership existing between them in zealous exertion, in suffering, and in recompense? "I have you in my heart," are his words, "inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace." (Phil. i. 7.)

And, if it be thought that ministerial faithfulness is less appreciated in the present day than it was in the earlier period of the church, it should be remarked, that there are now few exhibitions of pastoral conduct such as signalized the Apostles and primitive ministers of the gospel; and that

the clergy themselves are responsible for the opinion that may be entertained of them by the laity. Let them seek the interests of Christ and of his people, rather than their own renown and temporal profit; let them exhibit an example of that simplicity of manners, and of personal and domestic garniture, characteristic of the religion which they teach, rather than bedeck themselves and families in the gay livery of a proud world; let them seek the abodes of the poor and the broken-hearted, rather than the mansions of the wealthy and the titled; let them abandon the position of devotees to the rich and influential in society; and let them assume the attitude of the humble, the self-denying, the single-minded ambassadors for Christ; and they will no longer complain of want of respect and affection on the part of the religious community, but they will command the love and veneration of their flocks; and when they shall have finished their career of usefulness in the church, "they shall be exalted to shine as stars in the firmament, for ever, and for ever!"

CHAPTER XI.

SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

I.—THE PRESENT STATE OF PHILIPPI.

It is much to be regretted that scarcely any modern traveller has visited the city of Philippi. Dr. E. D. Clarke, who has so satisfactorily described most of the places of interest in its neighbourhood, such as Thessalonica, Neapolis, the river Strymon, &c., informs us that he passed it without being aware at the time that he had done so. The city is now little more than a scene of ruins, containing not more than a few score of houses, or rather hovels, inhabited chiefly by Turks. It still, however, contains the remains of a magnificent Amphitheatre, of a temple built by the emperor Claudius, and also of several superb marble tombs.

Such is the unspeakable admiration in which the writer holds the memory of that wonderful character and most renowned champion for the gospel, the Apostle Paul, that he confesses that scarcely any object could possibly afford more delight to his mind than to visit this cele-

brated scene of his labours. Indeed, but for the existence of one apparently insuperable obstacle, health and a safe passage permitting, the expiry of a very few months should find him engaged in endeavouring to illustrate the subject of the present volume, by exploring the mural remains of Philippi, by the examination of the still less alterable site upon which the city was built, of the plains by which it is surrounded, of the river that flows through its neighbourhood, and of the adjoining port of Neapolis, at which the Apostle landed upon his arrival from Troas, and where he had seen the vision that induced his first visit to Macedonia. And, having satisfied his curiosity, and secured the correctness of his remarks, by tracing, whilst yet upon the spot, appropriate sketches and observations, he would proceed to follow with feelings of reverence the route consecrated by the journey of that sainted character: passing through Amphipolis, he would proceed to Thessalonica, and, as Dr. Clarke intimates, he would seek for the more immediate scene of the Apostle's preaching, by visiting the synagogues and other places in that still flourishing city. From thence he would go on to Berea, to Athens, to Corinth, to Ephesus, to Antioch, ta Galatia, and still following the *via sancta*, he would return to Troas, and take shipping for Miletus and Syria. Through Syria he would follow his route to Tyre and Jerusalem; and, finally, he would like to have the melancholy satisfaction of tracing his voyage from thence to Rome, the city of his long captivity, and ultimate martyrdom.

II.—THE CANONICAL SCRIPTURES OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

“The word Canon (*Κανων*) as used by the early Christians, signifies a rule of faith. A canonical book, therefore, is equivalent to a legislative book of religious doctrines.

“The ancients seldom wrote their treatises with their own hand, but dictated to their freedmen and slaves. A great part of the New Testament was dictated after this manner. Paul noted it as a particular circumstance in the Epistle to the Galatians, that he had written it with his own hand. (Gal. vi. 11.) The amanuensis who wrote the Epistle to the Romans, has mentioned himself therein. (Rom. xvi. 22.)

“The sheets upon which the original Scriptures of the New Testament were written, were made from the papyrus-plant, which grew in Egypt, and more rarely in Syria and in the neighbourhood of Babylon. The sort used for epistolary correspondence was usually very thin.

“Recitation before a few friends, or in some cases before many persons, who were invited for the purpose, always preceded the publication of any work intended for general circulation. If the composition gave satisfaction, the author was requested to permit its transcription. Thus the works of the inspired writers became publicly known. The Epistles were read in those congregations to which they were directed, and whoever wished to possess copies of them, paid a person

for a copy, whose occupation consisted in transcribing the works of the learned. These books, when once put in circulation in this way, encountered, of course, the hazards of all publications issued in a similar manner. And as it was on the thin papyrus, easily susceptible of injury, that the apostolical writings were inscribed, curiosity, devotion, and application, would soon occasion in them many disfigurements. If such a copy were frequently exposed to the like usage, we may readily perceive that with every good intention towards it, it could last but very few years; and even if, under milder treatment, it endured for twenty years, the interval between Nero and Trajan, or that from Severus to Caracalla, had been sufficient to destroy it. This will account for the speedy loss of the original autograph copies of the New Testament Scriptures.

“With reference to the circulation of the various books of the New Testament, each person or church imparted to others the works which they possessed; each sent those that they possessed in return, and thus collections originated. In this manner, it will have been observed, the epistles of Ignatius were brought into a collection. Polycarp of Smyrna sent those which he possessed to Philippi, and the church at Philippi gave him in return all that they possessed.¹ Somewhat more than forty years before, the same thing happened with the works of the Apostles: a similar exchange of the Epistles of Paul, the church of Laodicea made with the church at Colosse. (Col. iv. 16.) In this way churches distri-

¹ See Chapter III.

buted to churches their apostolical documents. No writings, therefore, could obtain a place in this collection, on whose side the testimony of the communities which had received these Epistles, was not afforded, or unless those to whom they had been delivered had received them from them by whom they had been first published. We may conclude from the assertion of Peter, that the collection of Paul's writings had been completed in his time. For he informs his readers (2 Peter iii. 15, 16) that his beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom granted to him, had written the same to them, as well as *in all his epistles*, in which he speaks of this subject, viz. the coming of our Saviour. The early Christians had before them, in the Old Testament, a collection of inspired writings. The parallel, therefore, of the two laws, the *καινη* and *παλαια διαθηκη*, which was announced by our Lord, and enlarged by Paul, would soon suggest a similar collection of the writings of the Apostles. Accordingly, this collection was perfected under Trajan in those churches between which a more intimate union and an interchanging correspondence subsisted. And since this collection merely took its rise from the communication of one church with another, the distance, or other circumstances, which rendered intercourse difficult, had the unavoidable consequence of causing some more early, and others later, to possess certain Scriptures, and embody them in their codex. The collections at first must therefore have been different with respect to completeness, and must have remained so for a greater or shorter space, accord-

ing to circumstances. From this we may partly clear up the doubts which existed against particular books of the New Testament.

“As in the religious meetings of the Jews, the honour of publicly reading them in religious assemblies was commonly conferred only on the sacred books, the Law and the Prophets; so with the Christians, including the Old Testament, which they had received from the Jews, this eminent prerogative was only conceded to the writings of the Apostles. Hence Peter reckons the Epistles of Paul, the author being still alive, among the *γραφας*, *Scriptures*. (2 Peter iii. 15, 16.) And as the Jews designate their books under the general title of Law and Prophets, so the Christians comprehended theirs under the name of Gospels and Apostles. When these treatises were recognised as *Scripture*, and assumed, as such, the prerogative of being publicly read in the congregations, the collection of them could no longer be delayed, nor could particular books any more be circulated without inspection, or be curtailed, augmented, or altered at pleasure. On account of this eminent preference, they were called *δεδημοσιευμενα βιβλια* and *δεδημευμενια γραφαι*, *public books*, *books publicly circulated*; whilst, on the other hand, the epistles or other writings of otherwise good and holy men, were not allowed to be publicly read, and were named *αποκρυφα βιβλια*, *a private book*, *publicly unauthorized*. Thus an ancient teacher, speaking of Hermes, says we may read him with advantage, yet can we never publish him in the church among the list of the prophets,

nor among the apostolical documents.¹ This mark of distinction gave therefore such narrow limits to the collection, that no book could be admitted into it, which did not derive its origin from the fully authorized messengers of Christianity."²

"It is beyond all doubt that the pious diligence and zeal with which many learned and worthy men recommended the Sacred Writings, and spread them abroad in translations, which rendered them useful to those who were ignorant of the language in which they were written, contributed much to the success and propagation of the Christian doctrines. Latin versions of the Sacred Books were multiplied by the pious labours of the learned, with particular diligence, because that language was now more universal than any other. Among these versions, that which was distinguished by the name of the Italic, obtained universal preference, and was followed by the Syriac, Egyptian, and Ethiopic versions, whose dates it is impossible to fix with certainty."³

"The estimation in which the Scriptures of the New Testament were held by the primitive Christians, may be ascertained from the facts, that many of them had the whole or most of them by heart, that they generally carried a copy about their persons, making it their com-

¹ Anonym. apud Muratori, T. iii. *Antiq. Med. æv.* p. 853.

² Thus far is abridged from Hug's *Introduction to the writings of the New Testament*, translated by Dr. Wait, 2 vols. 8vo.

³ Mosheim.

panion wherever they went, and that many saints have been found buried with a copy of the New Testament lying upon their breasts.”¹

From the circumstance of there being in the early ages of Christianity no books but such as were in manuscript, copies of the Holy Scriptures, or parts of them, as well as books written by the Christians in defence of their doctrines, were incapable of that multiplication necessary to obviate their rarity and expensiveness. The consequence was, that although Christians themselves might possess them, the world had scarcely any other means of judging of Christianity, but through the medium of the lives of its professors. Thus it is, that it is often justly affirmed, that “the lives of the early Christians were arguments which no popular prejudice could resist, no Jewish logic refute, and no pagan persecution discredit.”² And, in truth, few means were more subservient to conversion than the beauty of the gospel, as exhibited in the temper and conduct of those who had embraced it, and were governed by its influence; exemplifying our Lord’s direction, “Let your light so shine before men, that they, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven;” as well as the observation of St. Paul, who, when writing to the Ephesians, says, “Ye are our epistles, seen and read of all men.”

¹ Fleury.

² Hannah More.

III.—THE EPISTLE OF POLYCARP TO THE PHILIPPIANS.¹

POLYCARP, and the presbyters that are with him, to the church of God which is at Philippi; mercy unto you, and peace from God Almighty, and the Lord Jesus Christ, our Saviour, be multiplied.

1. I rejoiced greatly with you in our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye received the imitators of Christ's love, and accompanied as it behoved you those who were in bonds, becoming saints; which bonds constitute the crowns of such as are truly chosen by God our Lord; as, also, that the root of the faith which was formerly preached unto you remains firm in you to this day, and brings forth fruit to our Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered himself to be brought even to the death for our sins; whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; "whom having not seen ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." Into which many desire to enter; knowing "that by grace ye are saved;" not by works, but by the will of God through Jesus Christ.

2. "Wherefore, girding up the loins of your mind, serve the Lord with fear and in truth;" laying aside all empty and vain speech, and the error of many; "believing in him that raised up our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead, and hath given him glory," and a throne at his right hand. To whom all things are made subject,

¹ The Translation of Archbishop Wake, slightly altered.

“both that are in heaven, and that are in earth ; whom every living creature shall worship ; who shall come to be the Judge of the quick and the dead ;” whose blood God shall require of them that believe not in him. But He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also raise us up in like manner, if we do his will, and walk according to his commandments, and love those things that he loved ; abstaining from all unrighteousness, inordinate affection, and love of money ; from evil-speaking, false witness, not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, or striking for striking, or cursing for cursing ; but remembering what the Lord has taught us, saying, “ Judge not, and ye shall not be judged ; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven ; be ye merciful, and ye shall obtain mercy ; for with the same measure that ye mete withal, it shall be measured to you again.” And, again, that “ blessed are the poor, and they that are persecuted for righteousness’ sake ; for theirs is the kingdom of God.”

3. These things, my brethren, I took not upon myself to write unto you concerning righteousness, but you yourselves encouraged me to do so. For neither can I, nor any such as I am, pretend to the wisdom of the blessed and illustrious Paul ; who, being himself in person with those of you who then lived, did with all exactness and soundness teach the truth ; and, being gone from you, wrote an epistle to you ; into which if you look, you will be able to edify yourselves in the faith that has been delivered unto you, being cheered by hope, and conducted on your way by love to God and to

Christ, and to our neighbour. For if any man possess these, he has fulfilled the law of righteousness, and is delivered from sin.

4. But the love of money is the root of all evil. Knowing, therefore, that as we brought nothing into the world, so neither may we carry any thing out, let us arm ourselves with the armour of righteousness, and walk according to the commandments of the Lord ; teaching your wives to walk likewise according to the faith that is given to them, in charity and in purity, loving their own husbands with all sincerity, and bringing up their children in the instruction and fear of the Lord. The widows likewise teach, that they be sober as to what concerns the faith of the Lord ; praying always for all men ; avoiding all detraction, evil-speaking, false witness, covetousness, and all evil ; knowing that they are the temples of God, who, knowing the thoughts and secrets of our hearts, sees every imperfection and blemish.

5. Knowing, therefore, that God will not be mocked, we ought to walk worthy both of his command and of his glory. Also the deacons must be blameless before Him, as the ministers of God in Christ, and not of men. Not false accusers ; not double-tongued ; not lovers of money : but moderate in all things ; compassionate ; walking according to the truth of the Lord, who was the servant of all : whom pleasing in this present world, by faith and holiness of conduct, we shall be made partakers of the life to come, according to the promise of our resurrection from the dead, and of our reigning together with

him in immortality. In like manner, the younger men must be unblameable in all things : above all, jealous of purity, and to restrain from all evil. For it is good to abstain from the lusts that are in the world, because they "war against the soul, and because neither fornicators, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, shall inherit the kingdom of God." Wherefore avoid all these things, being subject to the elders and deacons as unto God and Christ. The virgins advise to walk in all spotlessness and purity of conscience.

6. And let the elders be compassionate and merciful towards all ; turning them from their errors ; seeking out those that are weak ; not forgetting the widows, the fatherless, and the poor ; but always "providing what is good, both in the sight of God and man." Abstaining from all wrath, respect of persons, and unrighteous judgment ; and, especially, being free from all covetousness. Not easy to believe any thing against any ; not severe in reproach, knowing that we are all debtors in point of sin. If, therefore, we pray to the Lord that he would forgive us, we ought also to forgive others ; for we are all alike in the sight of God, and must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and shall every one give an account of himself. Let us, therefore, serve the Lord in fear and with all reverence, even as he has himself commanded, and as we have been taught by the apostles who have preached the gospel unto us, and by the prophets who foretold the coming of our Lord : being zealous of all that is good ; abstaining from all offence,

and from all false brethren, who bear the name of Christ deceitfully.

7. "For whosoever does not confess that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, he is Antichrist:" and whosoever does not confess his suffering upon the cross, is from the devil: and whosoever perverts the oracles of the Lord to suit his own lusts, and says that there shall neither be any resurrection nor judgment, he is the first-born of Satan. Wherefore, leaving the vanity of many and their false doctrines, let us adhere to the word that was delivered to us from the beginning; watching unto prayer and persevering in fasting, beseeching the all-seeing God not to lead us into temptation, since, as the Lord hath said, "The spirit truly is willing, but the flesh is weak."

8. Let us therefore, without ceasing, steadfastly trust in Him who is our hope, and the earnest of our righteousness, even Jesus Christ; "who his ownself bare our sins in his own body on the tree; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth;" who suffered for us, that we might live through Him. Let us therefore imitate his patience; and if we suffer for his name, let us glorify him; for he is our example, and in him have we believed.

9. Wherefore I exhort all of you that ye obey the word of righteousness, and exercise all patience, an example of which ye have seen set forth before your eyes, not only in the blessed Ignatius, and Zozimus, and Rufus, but in others among yourselves, and in Paul himself, and the rest of the apostles: being confident of

this, that all these have not run in vain, but in faith and righteousness, and are gone to the place that was prepared for them of the Lord. For they loved not the present world, but him who died and was raised again by God for us.

10. Stand therefore in these things, and follow the example of the Lord, being firm and immutable in the faith, lovers of the brotherhood, companions together in the truth, being kind and gentle towards each other, despising none. When it is in your power to do good, defer not, for charity saveth from death. "Be all of you subject one to another, having your conversation honest among the Gentiles;" that by your good works, both ye yourselves may receive praise, and "the Lord may not be blasphemed through you," for woe unto him by whom the Lord is blasphemed.

11. I am greatly afflicted for Valens, who was once a presbyter among you, that he should so little value the place that he occupied in the church. Wherefore I admonish you that ye abstain from covetousness, and that ye have your conversation in chastity and in truth. Keep yourselves from all evil, for he that in these things cannot govern himself, how shall he be able to teach them to others? If a man keep not himself from covetousness, he becomes polluted with idolatry, and shall be esteemed a heathen. Who of you are ignorant of the judgment of God? "Know ye not, as Paul observes, that the saints shall judge the world?" Not that I have perceived or heard that you, among whom the blessed Paul laboured, are guilty of covetousness. For he

glories of you in all those churches which at that time were established ; we, however, did not then know the true God. Wherefore, my brethren, I am grieved both for Valens and his wife ; to whom may God grant true repentance. And exercise ye moderation, and regard them not as enemies, but invite them back as suffering and erring members, that they may be saved, and that ye yourselves may be edified.

12. For I trust that ye are well instructed in the Holy Scriptures, and that ye have been led into all truth. I myself find the difficulty of practising the precept, “ Be angry and sin not ; ” and again, “ Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. ” Blessed is he that believeth and doeth these things ; which also I trust you do. Now the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and He himself who is our everlasting High Priest, the Son of God, even Jesus Christ, build you up in faith and in truth, and in all meekness and lenity—in patience and long-suffering—in forbearance and chastity—and grant unto you a lot and portion among his saints, and with you yourselves also, and to all that are under the heavens, who shall believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, and in his Father, who raised him from the dead. Pray for all the saints. Pray also for princes and for powers ; for those who hate you and persecute you, and for the enemies of the cross of Christ : that your fruit may be manifest, and that ye may be perfect in Christ.

13. Ye wrote to me, both ye and also Ignatius, that if any one went from hence into Syria, he should bring your letters with him ; which also I will see is done as

soon as I shall have a convenient opportunity ; either by myself or by a messenger. The Epistles of Ignatius which he wrote unto *us*, together with what others of his have come to our hands, we herewith send to you subjoined to this letter, according to your desire : by which ye may be greatly profited ; for they treat of faith and patience, and of all things that pertain to edification in our Lord.

14. What you know certainly concerning Ignatius and those that are with him, signify unto us.

These things have I written unto you by Crescens, whom, by this epistle, I have recommended to you, and do now again commend. For he has had his conversation without blame among us ; and I suppose also with you. Ye will also have regard unto his sister, when she shall come unto you. Be ye steadfast in the Lord Jesus Christ, and his grace be with you all. Amen.

¶ *Written from Smyrna, A. D. 107.*

IV.—THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER BY THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

IN the celebrated epistle that has been preserved of the Consul Pliny, in which he writes to the Emperor Trajan for instructions how to act with reference to the rapidly increasing sect of the Christians, he states, that the sum of their guilt or their error was, " that they met on a stated day before it was light, and addressed themselves in prayer to Christ, binding themselves not to commit any fraud, to falsify their words, or deny a

trust ; after which it was their custom to eat in common a harmless meal." What a testimony to the purity of their morals, especially as proceeding from a pagan chief magistrate ! This testimony, however, is here quoted as an evidence to the fact of the continued and solemn observance of the holy sacrament of the Lord's supper by the primitive Christians. The institution of this sacred rite is not only to be considered in the light of an act of grace to the people of God in all ages, but also as an appointment in the highest degree politic for the cause of true religion to the end of time. But for the divine appointment of this institution, what would have been the result ? In a few ages, the death of Christ, although it could not but have remained an authenticated fact, would have become a fact as little regarded as is now the death of Cicero or of Socrates. Its estimation would have been exactly that in which it is held by those self-named Christians who deny divinity to the eternal Son of God : whereas, by the appointment of this feast, was reared, and by its consequent celebration is preserved, a during and unquestionable monument, not only to the facts upon which Christianity is founded, but to the merciful design of that extraordinary circumstance which the institution memorialises. By the early saints the timeful celebration of the feast was accounted a visible mark of their profession as Christians ; it was around its simple board that the humble disciples of Christ manifested their adherence to the cause of the Redeemer, and exhibited their brotherly affection for their believing members : it was there that,

in seclusion from the world, they called to mind all the wonders of their Saviour's love, and expatiated on the facts of redemption ; it was there that, seated together as one holy family, they held familiar converse on all the circumstances connected with their position as Christians ; and it was there that, with affectionate sympathy, they endeavoured to encourage each other's faith by fervent appeals to the love of Jesus, as shadowed forth in the divine ordinance in which they were engaged. So imperious did they consider the duty of its celebration, and so persuaded were they that the remembrance of Christ and the achievements of his love formed the only antidote against apostacy, that they were accustomed to attend with the deepest solicitude to its repetition, however trying and desolating their circumstances. And what may be supposed to have been the consequence ? The Divine Founder of the festival would enable his devoted followers, whilst thus employed, to apprehend his presence, and his peace, and his love ; a hallowing influence would be shed around them ; and the forest, and the desert, and the den, whither they had been driven by their relentless enemies, would be dispelled of their gloom, and would be lighted up with the glory of heaven.

And similar have been the consequences, to the present moment, of a faithful discharge of the same duty. The Divine favour has been invariably bestowed, and the richest fruits of grace have ever been enjoyed, where it has been persevered in, and its simple and holy design has been kept in view. And how pleasingly solemn is

its fulfilment! What an influence have the sacred emblems upon the mind!—the sight of the broken bread and sacramental cup appear at once to transport us through the vista of ages, and we behold the blessed Jesus seated in the midst of the twelve; we hear the prediction of his approaching decease, and we listen with sentiments of sympathy and congratulation to the accompanying consolations and benedictions.¹ How salutary are such recollections! The soul is humbled in the presence of the Saviour, and his blessing accompanies the contemplation; the sanctifying tendency of the feast is realized; and, although we may have gone to the table with a mind beclouded and unhappy, yet has light sprung up, and unspeakable comfort been experienced, whilst thus in communion with our once suffering but now glorified Redeemer.

Nor let the weakest believer be discouraged: the condescending language of Christ, addressed to a church of Christian believers threescore years subsequently to his ascension, is still as applicable as ever; “Behold,” says he, “I stand at the door and knock; if any man open the door, I will come in unto him, and will sup with him, and he with me.” True, the sinner that has been made to see the actual desolateness of his heart by nature may, and is invariably found inclined to despair

¹ In the primitive era of the church it was customary, just before the sacred elements were communicated, for an elder to exclaim aloud, “Raise your hearts above!” upon which the whole assembly, with one voice, replied, “We raise our hearts to the Lord!”

of the possibility of ever obtaining those apprehensions of Christ's presence and favour, of which he hears believers speak, and which he himself now considers to be essential to happiness and salvation; but let him know that how little worthy soever he may esteem himself that Christ should come under his roof, Christ waits not to be invited: he has condescended to prevent the sinner's fears and hesitancy by inviting himself—"I will come in and sup with him." Nor let him ask, as did a child of faith of old, "Where is a lamb for a burnt offering?" wherewithal shall I make a provision suitable for so illustrious a guest? "The Lord himself will provide;" yea, he hath already done so. The broken and contrite heart, with which the sinner even now awaits to welcome him, is a sacrifice more acceptable to him than the blood of bulls, or of goats, or than all the spices of the East. Let but faith in Christ, and love to Christ, be expressed in ever so confused and indistinct a manner, and Christ will ever meet that expression with the kindest assurances of his sympathy. He who has knocked for admission at the sinner's heart, until "his locks are wet with the dew," will rejoice to observe the relentings* of the soul towards him, and will hasten to prove the sincerity of his love to the sinner, and the reality of his pretensions to a return of affection: he will not only sup with the believer, but the believer "shall sup with him:" he shall be made to apprehend and to appreciate the riches of that love of Christ, that induced him to assume the character and attributes of a Saviour of the lost soul, and that in

accordance with that character hath caused him to exhibit, and still to continue to exhibit, such ceaseless grace towards the object of his redeeming love: ability shall be given by the heavenly Comforter to regard the entire scriptural testimony concerning Christ in a new and spiritual point of view; and thereby shall he be led unceasingly to admire and to adore the matchless excellence of his character, and to become more and more willing to sacrifice every created good, whether physical or moral, for the enjoyment of the Saviour's blissful fellowship.

V.—THE SCHOOLS OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

“THE Christians took all possible care to accustom their children to the study of the Scriptures, and to instruct them in the doctrines of their holy religion; and schools were everywhere erected for this purpose, even from the very commencement of the Christian church. We must not, however, confound the schools designed only for children with the *gymnasia* or academies of the ancient Christians, erected in several large cities, in which persons of riper years, especially such as aspired to be public teachers, were instructed in the different branches both of human learning and sacred erudition. We may undoubtedly attribute to the apostles themselves, and their injunctions to their disciples, the excellent establishments in which the youth, destined to the holy ministry, received an education suitable to the solemn office they were to undertake.

St. John erected a school of this kind at Ephesus, and one of the same nature was founded by Polycarp at Smyrna. But none of these were in greater repute than that which was established at Alexandria, which was commonly supposed to have been erected by St. Mark."¹

VI.—THE NUMBER OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANS.

“ALTHOUGH we date our existence only from yesterday, we have filled every part of your (the Emperor of Rome) empire; we are to be found in your cities, your islands, your camps, your palaces, your forums * * * So great are our numbers, that we might successfully contend with you in open warfare, but were we only to withdraw ourselves from you, and to remove by common consent to some remote corner of the globe, our mere secession would be sufficient to accomplish your destruction and to avenge our cause. You would be left without subjects to govern, and would tremble at the solitude and silence around you—at the awful stillness of a dead world.” This, it must be observed, is intended by Tertullian to represent the progress that the gospel had made in less than two hundred years from its first promulgation by the apostles. In another place the same writer, in remarking upon the words, “Their sound went through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world,” observes, that the gospel had been preached and churches planted throughout

¹ Mosheim.

Asia and Africa, and that the Spaniards and the Gauls, yea, and those places of Britain which were unapproachable by the Roman army, were subdued to Christ, together with provinces and islands, which he professes himself unable to reckon up. And Irenæus, who wrote some years before Tertullian, is found stating that there were churches in Italy, Greece, in the East, in Egypt, in Spain, and in France. Irenæus was himself Bishop of Lyons in the latter country.

"I should be thought to advance a paradox, should I affirm, that there were more Christians in the world during those times of persecution (the first three centuries) than there are at present in these, which we call the flourishing times of Christianity. But this will be found an indisputable truth, if we form our calculations upon the opinion which prevailed in those days, that every one who lives in the habitual practice of any voluntary sin, actually cuts himself off from the benefit and profession of Christianity, and, whatever he may call himself, is in reality no Christian, nor ought to be esteemed such."¹

"There probably were more souls converted in the age of the Apostles, than had been before from the beginning of the world till that time."²

¹ Addison.

² Jonathan Edwards.—This is a bold conjecture, and one with which the writer was so far from coinciding, that he had actually appended to the quotation his reason for dissenting from it. He now confesses, however, that since his subsequent researches on

VII.—THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE PRIMITIVE AND MODERN CHRISTIANS.

“ Could they (the early Christians) have transmitted their spirit together with their name to succeeding generations, the face of ecclesiastical history would have been very different from what it now bears.”—*Rev. John Newton.*

It is hoped that it will have been observed, that no object has been further from the writer's intention, than the indulgence of censoriousness of spirit in the remarks that he has had occasion incidentally to introduce in the foregoing pages, on the various phases of religious profession, as presented at this more remote period of Christian history. The indulgence of such a spirit is both unamiable and unnecessary. Not but that the most cursory glance at the history of the church in its earliest stage, is sufficient to show that a vast difference really does exist between the features of Christian profession, as it was exhibited then, and as it appears at present; but a considerate mind will not fail to trace the evil to its true source, and to acknowledge the validity, in some degree, of the reasons that are capable of being adduced for the existence of this difference.

the subject, he considers it a far less startling supposition than he did when he first perused it. How vast, then, must have been the success of the gospel in the apostolic age, when the harvest of less than a century, under its dispensation, should be thought to excel that of four thousand years under former dispensations!

Christianity itself, in all its holy, and saving, and elevating character, still remains, like its Author, unchanged and unchangeable. The sacred source, too, from whence its doctrines are derived, hath been transmitted from age to age, pure and unmixed by error, so that whilst the works, or parts of the works, of the most celebrated writers of antiquity, are deplored by the learned, the volume of divine inspiration has been preserved in the church, entire and un mutilated, from the very first page to the very last verse and word: whilst the effects upon the believing mind of the truth of God, and the promises of God, and the atoning death of Christ, and the justifying tendency of his resurrection, still continue, in all their primeval power, to cheer, and to bless, and to save. Wherever, indeed, the immutable obligations of divine truth are acknowledged, the blessedness attached to a faithful observance of those obligations is enjoyed. And thus it is that are still witnessed so many and such bright examples of true piety; thus it is, that the holy character and tendency of the gospel, is still capable of being so luminously traced in the conduct of so many of its professors, and that its sustaining power is still observable in the triumphant testimony that it enables the believer to bear, whether in tribulation or in death.

When, however, after this consideration of the unalterable nature and tendency of Christianity, the single fact is stated, that in the year 1834, "the city of God upon earth," as Augustine has termed it, does not occupy a greater extent of territory than it did but three

centuries after its first establishment, it will assuredly be admitted that the cause of this lamentable arrest of the progress of the gospel, is to be looked for in some difference in the mode in which a profession of it has since been maintained by the visible church in general. Unostentatious though it be, and mild and unsolicitous of all physical aid, yet is the religion of the gospel a religion whose native beauty and blessedness must ever ensure its infallible progression. Left to maintain its empire simply by the energy of its own resources, it hath and it ever will manifest, the divinity of its origin, by the triumphant influence of its principles over all the powers of error and of sin. The periods of its most eminent successfulness were those in which it was thus left. And it has ever maintained the glory of its reign, and increased the sphere of its dominion, in the degree that it has been allowed to proceed in its peaceful conquests, unincumbered by every alliance foreign to its nature. "My kingdom," said Christ, "is not of this world, else would my servants fight."¹ Accordingly, nothing was further from the thoughts of

¹ So far were the early Christians from raising sedition or rebellion, that in all the many conspiracies that were formed against the Emperors, one after another for the space of 300 years, no one was ever found to have had a hand in any of them; though the Emperors were never so bad, and the persecutors never so cruel. They were the only persons who did not make it their business to get rid of Nero, Domitian, Commodus, Caracalla, and other tyrants."—*Fleury's Manners of the Primitive Christians*.

the first believers than the assumption of a profession of Christianity in compliance with custom; or that it would enable them to stand well with the world; or that, by means thereof, they should recommend themselves to posts of emolument and of honour. True, all this, in the first era of the church, were impossible; still, however, the principle that really did actuate them was in itself an evidence to the utter impossibility, under any circumstance, that they would ever have done so. Their profession was made with a simple and exclusive reference to the kingdom of Christ, as a spiritual kingdom, and as securing their alliance with God and with heaven. In this respect, therefore, what a difference has marked the general aspect of Christian profession, from the fatal period in which the church treacherously united its fortunes with that of one of the princes of the earth.¹ The consequence of that union has been, that the pretended representative of Peter has himself usurped the imperial diadem of Rome; the authority of Christ has been invaded; the arm of secular power has been sacrilegiously put forth in the maintenance of an apostate church; and, whilst a revenue of hypocritical service has thereby been secured, the earth has been deluged with the blood of those faithful subjects of Christ, who have dared to refuse allegiance, in matters of conscience, to any other sovereignty than his own. From this defection of the church from its exclusive allegiance, in matters of conscience, to the authority of Christ, is not

¹ Constantine.

only to be traced the loss to Christianity of all those spiritual qualities that were necessary to ensure its successful progress in the world, but thereby has been occasioned the palpable difference that has not ceased, from that time forward, to mark the general and more obvious aspect of religious profession. The paralyzing effect of that defection is still every where visible: nor has any single section of the church entirely escaped its baneful influence, notwithstanding the corrective agency that the Reformation from popery has happily put into operation.

It has been well observed, that the sum of the religion of the primitive Christians may be expressed in three words,—*believe, love, suffer*. Already has it been seen that the faith of the first Christians was eminently characterized by its simplicity. To believe in the gospel, was considered by them to signify the yielding an affectionate reliance upon the cheering fact, that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself: it consisted in a thankful acceptance of the terms of reconciliation, as announced by the Apostles, or as set forth in the inspired Scriptures; in the firm and assured persuasion that what the Holy Ghost had therein dictated, was absolutely and unequivocally the truth of God; and that what God had ordained as duty, was unhesitatingly to be received as an infallible rule of life; and what he had proffered as privilege, was to be as unhesitatingly accepted as a boon of grace. In a word, to believe, implied, in its original signification, as much to glory in the shame to which a profession of faith might expose

the individual in the sight of the world, and in the obligations which a belief of the truth imposed, as it did to glory in the high and holy privileges that are attached to a sincere profession of that faith.

And can it be said, that such has continued, and that such is to this day the distinguishing mark of Christian faith? Is it not but too true that, with respect to the church of Christ in its general aspect, a spirit of controversy, and the practice of darkening counsel by the amplification of creeds and confessions of faith, and systems of belief, has taken the place of that simplicity of reference to, and reliance upon, the testimony of God that marked the reception and profession of the truth in the first era of Christian history? Is it not a fact that a reverence is now attached to *names*, and an importance to *terms*, that tend to draw off the soul from the surrender of its sole homage to God, and from its attachment to the unalloyed and unparaphrased truth as it is in Jesus? And does not the single circumstance go at once to prove this, and to mark the difference that subsists between the primitive and modern Christians, that scarcely any volume, whether in the form of a doctrinal or practical treatise, or even of Christian biography, is now more eagerly perused, and more highly esteemed by the various parties whose hues it reflects, than such that in the most savoury manner tends to define and illustrate points of absolutely no real and essential importance?¹

¹ "The volume will be found to contain a melancholy exhibition of the unhappy influence which pride of intellect, an unbridled

But as faith may be said to form the key-stone, as it were, of genuine Christianity, as it is upon the degree of sincerity and vividness with which the truth of the gospel is received that the entire conduct of the Christian professor depends, it may be thought needless to prosecute the present inquiry further than remarking, that where there exists a pretension to the possession of Christian faith, the same nonconformity to the world, the same patient endurance of affliction and persecution, the same vigilant anticipation of the coming of Christ, the same love to the brethren, that characterized the primitive saints, must be looked for as the evidence to the sincerity of that profession; that the fruit of the Spirit hath been, is, and ever will be, love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, charity, faith, meekness, temperance, (Gal. v. 22, 23;) and that our Lord's criterion, both with respect to individuals and classes of believers, will ever remain the sole guide to a just estimation of Christian character, "By their fruits ye shall know them."

imagination, vain speculation, and selfish passions, have had in multiplying the diversity of religious opinion, and in giving rise to interminable dispute. The wide distance at which the various sections of the Christian family still stand from the simplicity of biblical Christianity is powerfully adapted to inspire the reader with an ever wakeful suspicion with respect to the exercise of human authority in matters of religion, &c."—*Preface to new edition of Buck's Theological Dictionary, by Dr. Henderson.*

THE END.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR,

Shortly will be published, printed uniformly with the present volume,

THE

GOSPEL SHEKINAH,

OR, THE

DIVINE PERSONALITY OF THE HOLY GHOST,

AND HIS

OMNIPOTENT AGENCY IN THE CHURCH,

ESSENTIAL TO THE ESTABLISHMENT AND CONSUMMATION OF
THE REIGN OF THE MESSIAH.

CONTENTS.

Chap.

- I.—A brief statement of palpable facts and arguments, by which to infer the authenticity and the divine authority of the Bible.
- II.—The doctrine of a Triune Deity a doctrine of the Bible; and one that could not possibly have obtained a surreptitious introduction into its pages.
- III.—The general testimony of the Bible in proof of the divine personality of the Holy Spirit; to which is added an inferential evidence.
- IV.—The Old Testament prophecies relating to the advent and agency of the Holy Spirit, under the Messiah's dispensation.
- V.—The predictions of Christ concerning the same subject.

CONTENTS.

Page.

VI.—An historical account of the fulfillment of the divine promises respecting the advent of the Holy Spirit, as manifested in his descent on the day of Pentecost.

VII.—Historical evidence of the fact of the subsequent presence of the Holy Spirit in the church.

VIII.—The divine prerogatives of the Holy Spirit.

IX.—The necessity for the endowment of believers with miraculous powers in the first era of the church.

X.—The reasons for the subsequent cessation of miracles in the church.

XI.—The means still possessed by the church for the maintenance of religious prosperity.

XII.—Supplementary notes and observations.

W. TYLER, PRINTER, IVY LANE, ST. PAUL'S.

1

2

111

112

113

